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Asymmetries in perceptions of self and others' hypocrisy: Rethinking the meaning and perception of the construct

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Abstract

This article examines how people recall and describe instances of hypocrisy in their own and others' behaviour. N = 302 participants provided two written examples. The first example recalled a time when someone called the participant a hypocrite, while the other recalled an instance when the participant perceived someone else's behaviour as hypocritical. One goal of the study was to discover if real-world examples of hypocrisy reflect only mere inconsistency, consistent with the construct's narrow use in psychology, or if they contain other distinctive defining features. A typology was used to code the examples, based loosely on Crisp and Cowton's philosophical distinction between four forms of hypocrisy: direct inconsistency, pretence, blame, and complacency. A second goal was to uncover reliable actor-observer differences in perceptions of hypocrisy. Results indicated that the four forms occur in real-world examples of both self and others' hypocrisy. Interestingly, a new fifth form, indirect inconsistency, emerged from the data, adding nuance to the initial hypothesis. Finally, several actor-observer differences in perceptions of hypocrisy arose and are discussed. The results indicate that hypocrisy is a much more complicated phenomenon than previously considered and provide the impetus for new areas of research.

INTRODUCTION

Oxford English Dictionary defines hypocrisy as "the assuming of a false appearance of virtue or goodness, with dissimulation of real character or inclinations, especially in respect of religious life or beliefs; hence in general sense, dissimulation, pretence, sham." The existing literature on hypocrisy is sparse and studies on the subject have only focused on the explicit behavioural inconsistency involved in hypocritical behaviour. For example, Batson, Thompson, Seufferling, and Whitney (1999) examined the inconsistency between what people reported as the most moral way to behave and how they actually behaved. Valdesolo and DeSteno (2007) explored the inconsistency between how one rated the fairness of his own versus other groups' actions. Barden, Rucker, and Petty (2005) investigated the inconsistency between what people said at one point in time and how they later acted. Stone

and Fernandez (2008) induced dissonance via hypocrisy by having participants promote safe sex and then later having them recall times where they practiced unsafe sex.

Explicit behavioural inconsistency serves as a proxy for hypocrisy, mainly because it serves as objective evidence that a person has behaved hypocritically. However, this narrow conceptualization may be inadequate for fully capturing the construct as hypocritical behaviour could have defining features besides inconsistency. The focus on inconsistent behaviour raises two questions addressed in the present study. The first is “What features of self and others’ behaviour influence whether behaviour is judged as hypocritical?” The second question addressed is “If there are different forms of hypocrisy, are there reliable differences that emerge in how individuals perceive them in accounts of both their own and others’ behaviour?” To begin with the first question, consider the different types of statements that are emblematic of those that participants provided when asked to recall examples of both their own and another person’s hypocrisy¹:

Example 1(own hypocrisy): “One weekend, I told my girlfriend I’d prefer if she didn’t drink at a party that she was going to attend with some friends because I was worried about all the drunken guys at the party hitting on her. She didn’t drink that night, but when I went out with my friends, I did. It felt hypocritical”

Example 2 (others’ hypocrisy): “College kids are hypocrites. They talk bad about people, then pretend they’re best friends with the person they were just dissing. My freshman year of college, these girls were like the mean girls of high school who loved drama. They were really friendly with this other girl, but only because she could get them free tickets to a concert. Then they turned around and told me that she was a big whore and that they weren’t going to talk to her after the concert.”

Example 3 (other’s hypocrisy): “I feel my uncle behaves hypocritically when he judges my decisions and behaviours. He’s made horrible decisions that have hurt his entire family as well as mine. I find it hypocritical when he criticises me. He’ll say I shouldn’t drink with my friends so much. However, he is a substance abuser and has fallen off the wagon numerous times, but still acts like he is superior and points out my mistakes at every opportunity as if he never made any mistakes in his life.”

Example 4 (own hypocrisy): “I am a member of a teen group at church. We all agree to do certain activities every week (volunteer hours, study groups, etc.), and some of it is very boring. No one checks on us, though, and everything is on the ‘honor system,’ so I usually slack off. I was called a hypocrite by another group member because he said he knew I was only doing the bare minimum to stay in the group.”

¹Please note that, in some instances, the stories presented in this document have been minimally altered. Most importantly, some details of the stories have been changed to ensure that it is impossible to identify the participants or those associated with the participants. However, the key elements of the stories that determine the form of hypocrisy have not been changed. Note also that the stories have been minimally altered in order to ensure that the statements are grammatically correct and easily readable. For these reasons, the examples provided should not be used to make any points other than those explicitly made in the manuscript.

Inconsistency is present in all of these examples, either between two behaviours or between a belief and a behaviour. However, it is not clear whether inconsistency is the salient factor driving the charge of hypocrisy in each example. The person who provided Example 2 seems to be bothered by the other girls' self-serving pretending and cruelty. The accuser in Example 3 is upset at what he feels is unjust criticism from his uncle, whose own faults are considerably worse in comparison. Finally, the person charged with hypocrisy in Example 4 is accused of opting to perform acts that are easy and superficial rather than those that are burdensome in order to portray a certain image. A common thread among these examples is that the accuser does not seem to believe that the hypocrite possesses the beliefs he or she endorses, and thus is being disingenuous. As will be advanced in this discussion, the perception of disingenuousness may be as important as the perception of inconsistency with respect to perceptions of hypocrisy.

Behaviours and attitudes may diverge to produce inconsistency for many reasons: norms that override attitudes in influencing behaviour (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975), low perceived self-efficacy (Ajzen, 1985), habits (Ronis, Yates, & Kirscht, 1989), and/or the high cost of behaviour/belief consistency (Batson et al., 1999). That said, discrepancies between beliefs and behaviour are not always perceived as hypocritical. There are several reasons that this is the case, including substituting noble intentions in the place of action (White & Plous, 1995), asymmetric weighting of one's own good intentions (Kruger & Gilovich, 2004), differential attribution of inconsistency based on the temporal order of the discrepant behaviour and standard (Barden et al., 2005), and motivated reasoning (Kunda, 1990). Failing to practice what one preaches reflects explicit behavioural inconsistency, but it also could suggest disingenuousness while preaching the initial message. As seen above, recognizing disingenuousness seems to be important in identifying hypocrisy. This could explain why when one's preaching is perceived as honourable, failure to follow through is not always viewed as hypocritical (Monin, Pizarro, & Beer, 2007) and the resulting inconsistency is not perceived as fully intentional. People perceive and judge intentional behaviour differently than they do unintentional behaviour, holding others accountable more for intentional behaviours (Malle, 1999). Thus, a key ingredient of hypocrisy appears to be the perception of intentional misleading during the "preaching" part of the process.

What Constitutes Hypocrisy? Moving Towards A Typology

While the literature on hypocrisy focuses almost exclusively on the inconsistency involved in hypocritical behaviour, it is clear that other factors may be sufficiently constitutive of hypocrisy. Therefore, a broader conception of the term may be needed. Psychologists have only addressed this issue in passing, but a number of philosophers have tackled it directly. Of note is the work of Crisp and Cowton (1994). They proposed that historical and literary examples of hypocrisy with salient features other than inconsistency abound. They identified four forms of hypocrisy that should emerge in perceptions of self and others' hypocrisy: inconsistency, pretence, blame, and complacency.

Inconsistency—The best example of inconsistency provided by Crisp and Cowton (1994) is of a teacher who insists students not put their hands in their pockets as it looks slovenly, yet always do so himself. Crisp and Cowton recognize the prevalence of inconsistency in

perceptions of hypocrisy, acknowledging that not practicing what you preach is “often and ordinarily taken to constitute hypocrisy” (p. 345). For the present study’s purpose, inconsistency was defined as “the profession of a moral requirement of others that one fails to abide by oneself; instances in which one says or implies something in public and behaves differently in private; examples in which one’s stated or implicit beliefs DO NOT match their behaviour.” Example 5 is indicative of inconsistency, as is Example 1.

Example 5: “My boss is a hypocrite. He will say not to do something because it is wrong, and then do exactly what he just told us not to do. Once, he told us during a meeting not to talk or text on our cell phones during meetings, then, when someone else was talking he was texting.”

Pretence—Crisp and Cowton (1994) explain pretence by referencing Moliere’s Tartuffe, a character notorious for feigning piety so as to gain favour from another character. Pretence is predicated on the hypocrite not upholding a publicly endorsed standard that he pretends to have or does not believe in. The Tartuffe example demonstrates that hypocrisy is perceived based on disingenuous preaching alone, particularly when one abuses morality for the sake of self-interest. Pretence, then, appears to be what one recognizes as hypocrisy when focusing exclusively on the inauthenticity of one’s tacit or explicit preaching, message, or persona. The present study defined pretence as “any implicit or explicit profession that one has a quality or characteristic that one knowingly does not actually possess or live up to, while hiding one’s true character or motivations, specifically to gain rewards or avoid punishments.” The individuals in Example 6, below, and Example 2 are guilty of hypocrisy by pretence.

Example 6: “I was called hypocritical by my brother after he noticed how I talked with different family members about politics. He knows that I am extremely liberal. However, my grandfather and aunt are extremely conservative. When I am around them, I agree with whatever they say because I want to make them both happy, even though I disagree with them 99% of the time.”

Blame—One example that Crisp and Cowton (1994) provide regarding blame is that of a mafia boss who, after ordering a hit on a rival mob boss, criticises his son for being lazy. Blame’s defining feature lies in criticizing another for similar faults that the critic himself possesses and is captured well in the idiom “the pot calling the kettle black.” Example 3 and Example 7, below, illustrate blame.

Example 7: “My girlfriend chews her fingernails, which I think is gross. I am always yelling at her about how disgusting that habit is. One day, she found out that I used to use chewing tobacco. She called me a hypocrite, and I guess I am from her point of view.”

Interestingly, blame can be perceived in the absence of inconsistency. Notice that one is comfortable calling the mafia boss a hypocrite without clear evidence that he himself is lazy. Disingenuous preaching is also present in blame, as the expression of moral indignation usually does not come out of a concern for moral principles, but rather, for the sake of gaining the moral high ground over another person. As seen in Examples 3 and 7, those

guilty of blame are adept at compartmentalization and drawing arbitrary distinctions between their own immoral behaviours and those of others. Applying a double standard could also be interpreted as blame when used to disenfranchise one of two equally guilty parties. This is especially true when the hypocrite fails to see that the standard he is applying to others is equally applicable to himself. Given this reasoning, the present study defines blame as “expressing moral indignation by attempting to criticise, derogate, or point out the faults of another person’s behaviour while (knowingly or unknowingly) possessing faults that may or may not be related to the fault being pointed out by the blamer.” Blame can be contrasted with pretence. In both cases, individuals are looking to achieve the moral high ground over others. There are two ways to do so: lifting oneself up (as in pretence) or knocking down someone else (as in blame).

Complacency—Crisp and Cowton (1994) illustrate complacency using the biblical example of the Pharisees who were criticised by Jesus for paying tithes, an easily met obligation, while overlooking their faith’s more arduous demands. These people “take morality seriously in very unimportant ways, ignoring its demands where their fulfillment appears costly” (p. 345). Disingenuous preaching is involved in complacency; the hypocrite wants to form an impression of himself and truly does have the beliefs he proclaims. However, he is only willing to do the minimum required to make that impression. “Cafeteria Catholics” or “Sunday Baptists” are commonly identifiable groups appropriately charged with complacency. These individuals want to appear to be adhering to all the tenets of their faith while picking and choosing which ones to uphold, often opting for those that are easiest, as in Example 8, below, and Example 4.

Example 8: “My friend claims to be Christian but he drinks, curses, smokes, and has sex. I think this is hypocritical. As a Christian, I live by all the teachings and expectations. He thinks as long as he believes in God and attends church on Sunday, he doesn’t need to do everything else.”

Given this, complacency was defined as “any example where the hypocrite makes an impression by claiming, implicitly or explicitly, to possess moral beliefs that require a great deal, and they do the easy things instead of the hard things required by those beliefs particularly so as to avoid accruing costs associated with their beliefs.” Complacency can also be contrasted with pretence, resulting in two important distinctions. In pretence, the hypocrite pretends to have said belief in order obtain rewards, whereas the hypocrite really does possess the belief in cases of complacency but wishes to avoid the costs associated with putting those beliefs into practice.

Protecting Against Accusations and Feelings of Hypocrisy

The idea that hypocrisy stems from perceptions of disingenuousness---as much if not more so than inconsistency---is well reflected in at least three of the four forms of hypocrisy detailed above. This has implications for actor-observer differences in perceptions of hypocrisy. Specifically, individuals can tolerate some degree of inconsistency in self-perceptions if they can rationalize those inconsistencies away (e.g., add consonant cognitions, Festinger, 1957). On the other hand, the self-perception of disingenuousness poses a direct threat to one’s sense of self-integrity by creating an identity predicament that

undermines the need to see oneself as authentic, consistent, and coherent (Breakwell, 1986; Kernis & Goldman, 2006; Swann, 1983). For this reason, we hypothesized that individuals are unlikely to acknowledge disingenuousness as characteristic of the self and will instead employ tactics to mitigate the negative implications of these identity predicaments. However, when reporting instances of another person's hypocrisy that results from the perception of disingenuousness, participants should not only feel no need to mitigate the negative implications associated with the accusation of hypocrisy, but should be motivated to provide evidence supportive of their accusation. Hence, we anticipated that the disingenuousness and inconsistency inherent in examples of hypocrisy might not be fully independent, particularly in stories of others' hypocrisy.

Brown (1998) highlights five strategies for dealing with identity predicaments, and we used these as the basis for coding the stories that participants provided. The first strategy that people employ involves claiming innocence or denying responsibility. Accordingly, when asked for examples of hypocrisy, some people should deny ever behaving hypocritically, but should easily be able to point to a time when an acquaintance, friend, or family member did. This hypothesis is supported by a well-established literature detailing the role of cognitive and memory biases in accounting for retrospective life narratives (e.g. egocentric bias, Ross & Sicoly, 1979) when judging the self. Since these biases are not present when judging others, individuals should be more likely to perceive inconsistencies in others' behaviours as evidence of hypocrisy.

A second way one could deal with the identity predicament produced by admitting to hypocrisy would be to admit to general behaviours for oneself and to accuse others of specific behaviours. Admitting to hypocritical behaviour that everyone does is less ego threatening, yet simultaneously would allow one to reduce dissonance and be a good subject by supplying an example of hypocrisy as requested. Three of the other four tactics Brown suggests that people use to mitigate the negative effects of identity predicaments and were lumped together and termed "mitigating information" for purposes of this study. These included: reinterpretation, altering the meaning of the event; justification, legitimizing the behaviour; and excusing, reducing responsibility for the behaviour by denying intentionality. People should use these strategies to provide more mitigating information for their own hypocrisy relative to that of others.

The Present Research

The first goal of this study was to determine the validity of the Crisp and Cowton-inspired typology. Our first hypothesis states that evidence of each of the four forms of hypocrisy introduced by Crisp and Cowton would be found in participants' stories of hypocrisy. Additionally, we predicted that most of these forms would be relatively independent of each other—especially when examining the overlap between examples of pretence, blame, and complacency—as we expected to find some degree of inconsistency in most examples, given that this would serve as evidence supportive of the accusation.

The second goal of this study was to discover which self-protective mechanisms people use to disown their own hypocrisy while simultaneously holding others accountable for theirs. Such mechanisms should produce several asymmetries in perceptions of self versus others'

hypocrisy. For Hypothesis 2, we hypothesized that: (a) Participants will provide less information about their own hypocrisy; (b) Because pretence, blame and complacency connote disingenuousness, participants will not want to admit to these forms of hypocrisy. As such, the proportion of stories involving pretence, blame and complacency, relative to inconsistency, will be lower for self-hypocrisy compared to others' hypocrisy; and (c) Participants will spontaneously provide more mitigating information for their own hypocrisy, especially for their own multidimensional examples.

METHOD

Participants

N = 302 students (153 males, 149 females) at a university in the south-western United States participated in one of two studies for partial completion of a course requirement. The average age of the participants was 19.79 years, $SD = 3.06$ years. Participants were 36% Hispanic, 35% Caucasian, 6% African American, 15% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 8% other/unidentified.

Procedure

Participants sat in a room with six computer stations. The task for the current study was completed after participants finished most of the protocol for either of two larger studies. At the end of both larger studies, participants provided two typewritten examples: one in which they perceived their own behaviour as hypocritical and another in which they perceived someone else's behaviour as hypocritical. For the former, participants were asked to "please write an example of an instance in which either (a) someone called you a hypocrite, or (b) you perceived your own behaviour as hypocritical." For the latter, participants were asked to "please write an example of an instance in which you perceived that someone was a hypocrite or was behaving hypocritically." The order of the questions was counterbalanced across the two larger studies such that 164 participants provided examples of self-hypocrisy first, followed by an example of another person's hypocrisy, and 138 provided examples in the opposite order.

Coding

A coding scheme was developed, consistent with the major purposes of this study. The first step was to decide if the participant provided an example and, if so, to next decide if the example was indicative of hypocrisy. Coders then determined which forms of hypocrisy were present in each example using the criteria outlined earlier. They could designate more than one form if multiple forms were present, but had to mark one form as primary and any others as secondary. Next, each example's level of specificity was rated as either specific or general. General statements consisted of trait-laden restatements of the definitions of the different forms of hypocrisy (e.g. "I am a hypocrite when I criticise others for stuff that I also do"). Specific examples drew on unique episodic memories of hypocritical behaviour. Coders then determined whether mitigating information was provided in the example. Mitigating information referred to any tactic used to lessen the impact of the hypocritical statement, including reinterpretation, justification, or excusing strategies.

Four coders practiced rating subsets of 25 examples to establish inter-rater reliability (IRR). Three of the four coders were aware of the major goal of identifying different forms of hypocrisy but were blind to the specific hypotheses. The remaining coder was an author on the paper, but his responses always had to agree with another coder to be counted and other protections, described later, were taken as well to prevent bias. High IRR was established among the four coders, obtaining a Fleiss' Kappa of no less than 0.70 for all categories, including ones with primary and secondary ratings. A correction for secondary ratings accounted for instances where coders saw multiple forms of hypocrisy but differed in which form they rated as primary. This correction did not significantly improve IRR, implying that coders were not only seeing the same forms of hypocrisy, but were also recognizing the same priority among the forms within the examples.

During practice, coders easily identified examples of pretence, blame and complacency. However, it was immediately clear that coders were struggling with some examples reflecting inconsistency. Some examples of inconsistency were straightforward and easy to classify, such as "my mom is hypocritical when she tells me not to drink, but she's always drinking." Other examples were not so directly inconsistent, such as "my mom tells me not to drink, but she smokes, which is worse." There were several examples like this, more for examples of others' than for self-hypocrisy. Coders could not code this as blame as the criticism component was weak or missing, yet were uncomfortable calling the latter example the same as the former. It was determined that enough of the latter examples existed to merit a new category which was named "indirect inconsistency," in contrast to what was called traditional "direct inconsistency." This new form was added to the final coding scheme, as it appeared that it was a distinction hereunto unaccounted for that offered interesting contrasts when compared to the other forms. Operationally, the distinction between these two forms was as follows:

Direct Inconsistency—When one says or implies that someone should or should not do something, then later violates that exact standard. For example, a person proclaims that people should exercise and eat healthy, yet he never exercises and eats fast food twice a day.

Indirect Inconsistency—When one says or implies that someone should or should not do something, then later does or does not do something that can be perceived as similar. For example, a person says others should not smoke cigarettes, yet he himself uses chewing tobacco.

An important theoretical consequence of indirect inconsistency is that perceivers should be motivated to extend the range of behaviours that are psychologically similar for others' hypocrisy, but should not do so for their own. Consequently, we expected to see more examples of it for others' hypocrisy. As a distinct form, indirect inconsistency provides nuanced contrasts when compared to the other forms. For example, pretence can appear to be indirect inconsistency, but with pretence the pretending component is more salient than the inconsistency, and thus underscores the charge of hypocrisy. Complacency can also appear to be indirect inconsistency, but in cases of complacency, the failure to achieve the loftier requirements of one's proclaimed belief structure (the laziness or cost avoidance component) drives the charge of hypocrisy more so than does the inconsistent behaviour.

Blame can also appear to be indirect inconsistency but two important distinctions are noteworthy. First, in cases of blame, the criticism component of the behaviour is salient and drives accusations of hypocrisy rather than the inconsistency. Second, with indirect inconsistency, the inconsistent behaviour has to be able to be perceived as similar. Contrarily, in cases of blame the hypocrite's inconsistent behaviour need not be similar at all (e.g. the mafia boss tells his son not to be lazy, after ordering a hit on a rival mob boss). Also, the fault of the hypocrite need not be worse than that which he is pointing out in another, but the criticism seems especially ironic, and thus is more salient, when such is the case as in blame.

After establishing high IRR during practice with all variables (including "indirect inconsistency"), the coders were split into two groups that each rated 302 stories of hypocrisy. The stories these groups rated were counterbalanced to 1) prevent order effects resulting from different rating tendencies that might exist between groups, 2) ensure that each group rated the same number of self versus other examples given by participants regardless of order of presentation, and most importantly, 3) ensure that no coder rated both examples provided by a single participant. The latter point ensured that even if coders had some idea about the hypotheses, they would be unable to bias the results. High IRR was established amongst the coders (Cohen's Kappa = .77 for original ratings, .79 for corrected ratings). A final meeting was called to settle any disagreements and the results of this final meeting provided the data used in the analyses reported below. Also, an independent auditor not part of the original team verified that the coders' ratings were consistent with the coding scheme. The auditor reviewed all 604 examples.

RESULTS

Validation of the Typology

Are indirect inconsistency, pretence, blame, and complacency distinct forms?

—The first prediction was that indirect inconsistency, pretence, blame, and complacency would all be distinct from one another, as evidenced by small to moderate non-significant correlations. Indeed, this was the case. For self-hypocrisy the phi coefficients amongst these four forms ranged from $-.05$ to $.32$, with an average phi coefficient of $.06$. Furthermore, the average percent overlap (14.68%) between the various forms was also low. Similarly, for others' hypocrisy, the phi coefficients ranged from $-.03$ to $.20$, with an average phi coefficient of $.08$. The average percent overlap (27.50%) between the four forms was also low. That there was relatively little overlap between these forms in examples of both self and others' hypocrisy, coupled with the low phi coefficients, strongly suggests that indirect inconsistency, pretence, blame, and complacency are not redundant.

How are the other forms related to direct inconsistency?—The second prediction made by the first hypothesis was that pretence, blame, and inconsistency would be related to direct inconsistency, since providing evidence of direct inconsistency generally serves as objective evidence that someone has behaved hypocritically. There was no overlap between examples that contained direct and indirect inconsistency in examples of self or others' hypocrisy, because, by definition, there cannot be any. As predicted, the percent overlap that

the total number of examples of pretence, blame, and complacency shared with direct inconsistency was generally large. These overlaps ranged from 46.70% to 83.30%, with an average of 67.30% for examples of self-hypocrisy and ranged from 57.50% to 71.80% with an average of 66.10% for examples of other's hypocrisy. These overlaps suggest that there were many multidimensional examples, and indeed, there were. However, in almost all of these multidimensional examples, direct inconsistency was marked as secondary relative to the other forms, indicating that participants were providing evidence of inconsistency to support the other forms. That direct inconsistency was also present in many of the examples containing pretence, blame, and complacency, coupled with the weak relationships among pretence, blame, complacency, and indirect inconsistency, the first hypothesis can be considered largely confirmed. For purposes of illustration, multidimensional examples included:

Self-Blame/Indirect Inconsistency: *"My friend called me a hypocrite when I yelled at her for making out with a boy she wasn't dating and had just met. I told her it was gross, that she should be embarrassed, and that she shouldn't have done that because he probably wouldn't ever talk to her again. I said those things because I didn't want her to get hurt. A couple of months later I had sex with a boy I wasn't dating. Even though I had known him for several years, she still called me a hypocrite and I do believe it was slightly hypocritical of me."*

Others' Indirect Inconsistency/Complacency/Blame: *"A girl I used to be friends with told me that she would 'pray for me' because I would occasionally consume alcohol. She would preach to me about how it was against the bible to drink. Although she was preaching to me, she had had premarital sex numerous times. Preaching to me about things that she should have been preaching to herself was hypocritical. I think she really was a Christian, as long as it only meant going to church on Sunday (in other ways/situations she was really nice), but I didn't like how she was throwing stones when she lived in a glass house."*

Actor-Observer Biases in Perceptions of Hypocrisy

This study's second research question assessed a number of predicted differences between how examples of self and others' hypocrisy would differ in ways that were self-protective. Table 1 shows the number of examples and percentages of total examples represented in a number of variables and the resulting McNemar p-values indicating whether the difference between self and others' hypocrisy was significant.

As predicted by Part A of Hypothesis 2, participants gave significantly less information about their own hypocrisy. This occurred in numerous ways. First, participants provided more "blank answers" which had no story whatsoever when describing themselves relative to when describing others. Examples of blank answers for others were generally short (e.g., *"I can't think of anything"*). Interestingly, however, for examples of self-hypocrisy the blank answers were somewhat longer and much more self-affirmative (e.g., *"I don't feel like I've ever done anything hypocritical, I always try to stay true to myself,"* or *"I have never been called a hypocrite. I think mostly because I just tell it how it is."*). Moreover, only eight participants failed to provide an example for both self and others, indicating that this effect

was not likely due to processes unrelated to hypocrisy (e.g. participant apathy). Twenty-five participants provided examples of others' hypocrisy but failed to provide an example for themselves, while only eleven did the converse. Since most participants provided at least one of the two solicited examples, and these examples were more likely to be an example of another persons' hypocrisy, we took this as evidence of biased reporting by participants. Secondly, even when participants gave examples, the number that reflected hypocrisy was significantly greater for others' hypocrisy (267 vs. 247 examples, Table 1). Participants provided more stories that were not actually indicative of hypocrisy for themselves. Often, these examples were also self-affirmative. Examples included:

"I served my country in the military but voted for a Democrat because I felt he had the best plan. Many of my conservative friends did not like that but you have to stand up for what you believe in regardless of what other people think."

"I have been called a hypocrite because I like to hook up with as many girls as possible, but the girls get mad because they are looked down upon if they mess around with a bunch of guys. It's like this: if a key can open many locks, it is a master key, but if a lock is opened by many keys, it's just a crappy lock. I'm staying true to myself and they should too, and not care what people think."

Examples of others' hypocrisy that did not reflect hypocrisy were much different in tone, often still reflecting negatively on the person in the story despite not casting the person in the story as a hypocrite. Furthermore, in many of these examples the participants seemed to view the other person's behaviour as hypocritical because said behaviour was contrary to the participants' own beliefs and standards. Examples included:

"I have a friend who lives in America, but she loves Communism. I heard this and it just bothered me to the bone. She explained everything in detail, but it just doesn't click because, as we all know in America, Communism might as well be a euphemism for the devil. It really bothered me because I would never want the country to succumb to that."

"My friend's parents are extremely hypocritical. I guess I am a liberal when it comes to race. I feel it is wrong to racially profile or make racial slurs about others. I am very open to diverse communities. I do not discriminate, and I feel it is morally wrong. My friend's parents talk about people of other races very crudely, and it makes me very uncomfortable."

Finally, participants used significantly more words to describe others' hypocrisy than their own ($M = 104.30$, $SD = 70.18$ vs. $M = 67.38$, $SD = 52.41$; $t(246) = 6.80$, $p < .001$). Contrary to our predictions, the number of specific and general examples did not differ significantly between self and others' hypocrisy, though this lack of specificity can be accounted for elsewhere in the data.

Part B of Hypothesis 2 argued that, because pretence, blame and complacency are more socially undesirable than inconsistency—often connoting disingenuousness, the proportion of these examples should be lower for self-reports of hypocrisy. This prediction was confirmed. For pretence, blame and complacency, the raw number of examples were significantly higher for others' hypocrisy than for self-hypocrisy, but more importantly, the

proportions of each, relative to total examples of hypocritical stories, were significantly higher as well (2.89, 2.41, and 1.76 times higher, respectively). Participants generally stuck to examples of inconsistency for their own hypocrisy but reached for richer and more varied examples for others, which in and of itself may be viewed as a hypocritical act.

Finally, part C of Hypothesis 2 was confirmed as participants provided significantly more examples of mitigating information (56 vs. 10) when describing their own hypocrisy than when describing others (see Table 1). Participants engaged in reinterpretation, justification, and excusing strategies to minimize their own hypocrisy, as predicted. Examples included:

Reinterpretation: *“I am a leader for a Christian Youth Organization and I work very closely with high school teens. I am often faced with the teens coming to me and asking for advice with problems such as drugs or drinking. I used to often feel hypocritical because as a high schooler I did drugs, drank, and worse, but I now encourage others to stay away from those things...In a way, I don’t feel hypocritical anymore because my mistakes helped make me a stronger person so they aren’t really mistakes at all.”*

Justification: *“I have always been fairly against the use of many prescription drugs...I also am strongly against their use as social crutches to get people to reach an unachievable level of perfection and happiness. Anyways, when I started college I went to the doctor and received a prescription for Adderall to help me study and Ambien to help me sleep. I am aware that I have become rather dependant on them, now needing the Adderall to study and the Ambien to sleep. Despite this, I still maintain my anti-prescription views but personally, it is just too easy to get and too effective on me to stop because of my moral objections. It helps me be who I really want to be, and for this, I consider myself a hypocrite.”*

Excusing: *“I am a Gay male and I often find myself acting hypocritically due to the fact that I’m afraid of being rejected based on my sexuality. One particular time I was with a group of heterosexual men that I had just met a few days prior and they began talking about girls. They were not aware of my sexuality...As soon as they saw an attractive girl walking by they asked me what I thought about her. And so I began...telling them how hot she was and that I would definitely go to bed with her, when in reality she was not appealing to me at all. I didn’t even mean to do it, the words just sort of jumped out of my mouth, almost like it was the fear talking, not me. After a while I realized that I had been hypocritical towards my beliefs, even though I didn’t mean to, and felt guilty about it.”*

Deeper examination of the multidimensionality and mitigating information trends yielded interesting results. For example, for others’ hypocrisy, none of the forms contained more mitigating information than expected by chance. However, for self-hypocrisy, more mitigating information than expected by chance was given for every form except direct inconsistency (Table 2). Furthermore, multidimensional examples of others’ hypocrisy included no more mitigating information than would be expected by chance. However, participants provided significantly more mitigating information for their own multidimensional examples, presumably to distance themselves from their behaviours, again confirming part C of Hypothesis 2.

It was noted earlier that participants provided significantly more multidimensional examples for others' hypocrisy (Table 1). However, deeper examination of the data showed that participants provided far more multidimensional examples than expected by chance for every form of hypocrisy except direct inconsistency. This was the case in examples of both self and others' hypocrisy. This, combined with earlier evidence, suggests that direct inconsistency, the layman's understanding of the term, appears to be the only form sufficient in and of itself to charge others and oneself with hypocrisy.

Additionally, there was no difference between the amounts of general and specific hypocrisy provided for self and others' hypocrisy. An expected lack of specificity for examples of self-hypocrisy did not emerge. However, this can be explained by considering the examples for which participants provided mitigating information. Instead of providing different amounts of both general and specific examples, participants provided roughly equal numbers of both for self and others' hypocrisy (Table 1). They made up for the lack of specificity by giving more mitigating information for their own hypocrisy, but only when they provided specific examples $\chi^2(1, N = 302) = 7.91, p = .005$. What we expected to manifest itself as a lack of specificity emerged in how participants used mitigating information to explain away their own hypocrisy.

Finally, though not hypothesized, we tested for two order effects. The first effect examined whether the order in which participants provided stories influenced the type of stories they provided. Story order was not related to any of the forms for stories about others; participants provided similar amounts for each form regardless of which story they provided first. For their own hypocritical stories, order of presentation was not related to four of the five forms. The lone exception was that participants provided fewer examples of their own indirect inconsistency than expected by chance when they provided examples of others' hypocrisy first. Overall, story order had minimal effects on the proportion of stories provided for each form.

The second order effect examined whether the type of story participants provided first influenced what type they provided second. One might suspect that participants would be motivated to provide either a similar or worse example for the other person so their own example would not look as bad by comparison. They did both, depending on which example they provided first. We examined the relationship between each of the forms in stories of self and others' hypocrisy separately for participants in both orders. Results can be seen in Table 3. It appears that a priming effect occurred for participants who provided examples of self-hypocrisy first with respect to four of the five forms. A discernible pattern occurred whereby these individuals were more likely to provide examples of direct inconsistency, indirect inconsistency, pretence, and blame for others, provided they first gave a story containing one of these forms for themselves. A possible cognitive explanation for these results is that the story of self-hypocrisy activated a schema or mind-set that was then used to generate an example of other-hypocrisy. Though this possibility cannot be ruled out, there is some evidence that participants were motivated to normalize their hypocritical behaviour. For instance, examples of direct inconsistency in the self were not only followed by more examples of direct inconsistency in others, but were also followed by examples that included pretence ($r = .16$).

The stronger evidence pointing to motivational processes, however, lies in the contrasting pattern of correlations for participants who first provided examples of others' hypocrisy. These participants provided less egregious examples for themselves for two forms. First, when they provided examples of blame for others first, they subsequently provided more examples of indirect inconsistency for themselves. Second, when they provided examples of pretence (which connotes the most disingenuousness) for others first, they subsequently provided more examples of blame for themselves. This suggests that participants were willing to admit to the more egregious forms when they knew their example of self-hypocrisy would fare well in comparison.

DISCUSSION

"No habit or quality is more easily acquired than hypocrisy, nor any thing sooner learned than to deny the sentiments of our hearts and the principle we act from."

-Bernard de Mandeville

This study set out to uncover whether hypocrisy is more than mere inconsistency, and, if so, what else contributes to its perception. A secondary purpose was to determine how people perceive and explain hypocrisy differently in their own versus others' behaviour. With respect to the primary goal, it can be asserted that a broader conception of hypocrisy is warranted, given the numerous ways that participants described their own and others' hypocritical behaviour. Crisp and Cowton's (1994) four forms, as well as a new unique form, indirect inconsistency, all appeared in participants' examples of self and others' hypocrisy. These forms have different underlying salient features and are not redundant.

That said, while there appears to be several forms of hypocrisy, not all forms are created equal. Direct inconsistency, the layman's understanding of the term, appears to be sufficiently constitutive of hypocrisy in two ways. First, when participants provided such examples, they did not try to explain the hypocrisy away, to reinterpret it, or to provide mitigating information as people usually do when faced with identity predicaments. Moreover, participants gave a large number of stories involving direct inconsistency, most of which consisted of that form alone. In contrast, stories involving pretence, blame and complacency were often multidimensional.

We suspect these findings occurred because in cases of direct inconsistency the behaviours and standards involved in the hypocrisy are the same, making it difficult to make believable and relevant distinctions between them, even to oneself. Direct inconsistency, it seems, robs the hypocrite of the ability to engage in motivated reasoning (Kunda, 1990). This makes it difficult to perceive a behaviour as moral or consistent when it is not, a self-deception tactic that could make hypocrisy possible (Batson et al., 1999). Contrarily, cases of indirect inconsistency invite the hypocrite to find differences that may or may not actually exist. This affords the hypocrite a chance to reasonably avoid comparing his behaviour to his standards as such standards can be rationalized away as not applicable, another (more likely) self-deception strategy that could make hypocrisy possible (Batson et al., 1999).

Parsing direct and indirect inconsistency may explain why participants in Valdesolo and DeSteno (2007) viewed their behaviour as fairer than the same behaviour when performed by others. In that study, participants who kept the desirable task for themselves may have seen their behaviour as only indirectly inconsistent while viewing others who kept the desirable task as directly inconsistent. This suggests that direct inconsistency is more indicting, resulting in more dissonance when made salient. Given this, it is not surprising that Stone, Wiegand, Cooper, and Aronson (1997) found that individuals, when faced with their own directly inconsistent behaviour chose to reduce the resulting dissonance by rectifying the behaviour directly even over behaviours they claimed to care more about or found more morally important.

Perhaps even more interesting than finding that multiple forms contribute to the perception of hypocrisy are the numerous actor-observer asymmetries that emerged. First, participants not only provided significantly more examples of hypocrisy for others overall, they also did so for every form except for direct inconsistency. Furthermore, for pretence, blame, and complacency, not only were the raw number and percentages of examples significantly higher for others' hypocrisy, but the proportions of each, relative to total examples of inconsistency, were higher as well. In general, participants generally stuck to examples of inconsistency for themselves but reached for more varied examples for others, using inconsistency secondarily as supporting evidence.

As noted earlier, admitting to one's own hypocrisy creates dissonance (Stone & Fernandez, 2008) which participants dealt with in a number of ways. Some denied ever being a hypocrite or did not give an example. Others told stories that were not indicative of hypocrisy. Several of them provided unsolicited mitigating information to explain away their own hypocrisy, particularly when they provided specific examples. Participants also employed indirect inconsistency in interesting ways. That participants were reluctant to provide examples of their own indirect inconsistency after reporting on another person's hypocrisy first, and the fact that there were twice as many examples of indirect inconsistency for examples of others' hypocritical behaviour implies that we extend the range of things that are similar when judging others' hypocrisy, and restrict it when judging our own. Future studies could examine whether this is the case, whether one type of inconsistency leads to more dissonance, whether both types are equally influential in producing behaviour change (Stone & Fernandez, 2008), and whether order effects cause them to be perceived differently (Barden et al., 2005).

However, dissonance reduction is not the only adaptation or mechanism that could account for many of these asymmetries. Given the term's negative connotation, admitting to hypocrisy may simply cause individuals to feel bad about themselves, in which case numerous self-enhancement biases could also be contributing. For example, the use of more mitigating information to deny blame for personal failures in stories of self-hypocrisy could be seen as a self-serving attribution. Similarly, because people tend to harbour positive illusions about themselves (e.g. better-than-average effect) and desire to see themselves favourably relative to their peers (Lewinsohn, Mischel, Chaplin, & Barton, 1980), it is possible that the more egregious forms of hypocrisy were reported more for others as a means of boosting one's self-esteem by engaging in downward social comparison.

Many of the findings above are also consistent with previous findings regarding the actor-observer bias. As noted previously, we believe the data best fit with motivational processes posited to underlie this bias; however, it is also possible that informational explanations may account for the observed asymmetries. As individuals generally perceive their own traits as highly variable given that the expression of those traits are tied to varying contextual demands (Baxter & Goldberg, 1987; Storms, 1973), it is possible that individuals provide more mitigating information for themselves because they are focused on relevant situational cues that provide the context for their inconsistent behaviours. Alternatively, perhaps more mitigating information was provided for examples of self-hypocrisy simply because participants were aware of the reasons for their own hypocritical behaviour; this would be consistent with prior evidence that individuals view themselves as more complex and multifaceted than others (Sande, Goethals, & Radloff, 1988).

Though these informational processes may contribute to the asymmetries observed here, there remain indications that the stories given were motivated. For instance, where Sande et al. found that others are seen as less complex, our participants gave more complex and elaborate accounts of hypocrisy for others than for themselves, suggesting that they desired to cast the accused in an unfavourable light. Secondly, participants were more likely to provide stories of others' hypocrisy that included the same forms of stories as their own (even those reflecting more disingenuousness) when they had first provided examples of their own hypocrisy, ostensibly normalizing their own hypocritical behaviour. Moreover, when participants first reported on a more disingenuous form for another person, they were sometimes willing to admit to a less disingenuous form for themselves. These order effects seem consistent with Dunning's (2012) assertion that "Social judgment is a symbolic act, one that holds tacit implications for the self. As such, people treat evaluations of others as evaluations of themselves...and manage their judgments of others to affirm and retain flattering self-images" (p. 496).

Limitations and Future Directions

This study was exploratory in many ways, and was not without its limitations. For example, all accounts of hypocrisy were self-generated, and such reports are subject to biased memory processes that may underlie the mitigation effects and other asymmetries reported here. Future research could determine whether the same asymmetries emerge using experimental designs. That said, a key advantage of the qualitative methodology employed here is the richness of the stories and the added mundane realism. Additionally, while the approach taken in this study helped expand and elucidate the construct, it was not done in a manner typical of how construct exploration is done in psychology. At first, our coding scheme almost forced coders to pick one of the initial four forms whenever they said an example reflected hypocrisy. The coders noted this issue early and steps were taken to address this issue, resulting in a new form being uncovered.

That said, these forms are important for at least two reasons. The first is that these forms were present in stories of hypocrisy because they reflect underlying dimensions that comprise the construct. A follow up study is currently underway to identify these dimensions in a more direct way, consistent with best practices for construct exploration. We

believe that there are at least two factors that will arise: inconsistency and insincerity (or disingenuousness). The second reason we believe these forms are important is because they may have implications for person perception. That is, we believe that people will judge a person guilty of pretence differently than someone guilty of blame on a variety of important and relevant traits. However, we do not believe they will differ in how hypocritical or inconsistent they view these individuals.

We also believe that these forms and their underlying dimensions could have applications in research on dissonance and behaviour change, as well as gender differences in hypocrisy. Furthermore, expanding the construct could present new measurement approaches and operationalizations that are currently not possible given psychology's current narrow understanding of the term. Rethinking the construct could lead to new insights into group-related motivational processes, system justification, power dynamics, and evolutionary perspectives.

Perhaps the most interesting area where this work could be applied is in the arena of self-control/regulation. Though not reflected in the literature, hypocrisy could be due to conflicts between distal, abstract desires, goals, or standards and ones that are more proximal and concrete. The result of this type of conflict is a self-control dilemma (Hoch & Loewenstein, 1991). Often, the salience and proximity of the immediate, concrete goal or standard prevails over those that are more distal and abstract. Many of the stories in this study illustrate that hypocrisy could be thought of as the failure to promote loftier, more abstract goals and standards in favour of the immediate impulse gratification that arises from pursuing proximal and concrete goals or standards.

If hypocrisy results from failing self-control dilemmas, it can be asserted that those skilled at inhibiting impulses would be able to avoid behaving hypocritically better than those who lack such skill. Mechanisms by which this could occur include: proactively restricting future access to potential temptations (Wertenbroch, 1998), cognitive reconstrual of temptations (Kross, Ayduk, & Mischel, 2005), or development of asymmetric associations between one's distal goals and proximal temptations (Fishbach, Friedman, & Kruglanski, 2003).

Overall, this study has been useful in contributing to the conversation on moral hypocrisy. The variety of ways people's stories reflected hypocrisy shows that a broader conception of the construct appears warranted. Expanding the construct could prove fruitful for future research, promoting greater conceptual clarity as well as integration of people's lay understanding and perceptions of hypocrisy with current empirical findings across various contexts. Lastly, understanding the variety of ways that people behave hypocritically may help us figure out how to best combat the phenomenon in our own and others' behaviour.

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Table 1

Differences in Example Specificity and Forms of Hypocrisy for Self and Others

	Self		Other		
	# of Examples	% of total	# of Examples	% of total	McNemar p-value
<i>Example Specificity</i>					
Example Given	269	89.07	283	93.71	0.03
Example = Hypocrisy	247	81.79	267	88.41	0.01
Specific Examples	225	74.50	238	78.81	0.17
General Examples	20	6.62	23	7.62	0.72
Mitigating Information	56	18.54	10	3.31	<.001
Multidimensionality	68	22.52	157	51.99	<.001
<i>Form of Hypocrisy</i>					
Direct Inconsistency	215	71.19	209	69.21	0.60
Indirect Inconsistency	23	7.62	44	14.57	0.004
Pretence	30	9.93	94	31.13	<.001
Blame	30	9.93	78	25.83	<.001
Complacency	21	6.95	40	13.25	0.01

Note: Bold variables are significant at designated McNemar p-value level for comparisons between self and others' hypocrisy.

Degree to Which Mitigating Information Was Provided With Each Form of Hypocrisy for Self and Others' Hypocrisy

Table 2

Form of Hypocrisy	Self					Other				
	Phi	Expected/ Observed Examples	Diff.	χ^2	p-value	Phi	Expected/ Observed Examples	Diff.	χ^2	p-value
Direct Inconsistency	.06	39.9/43	+3.1	1.05	0.31	.04	6.9/6	-0.9	0.41	0.52
Indirect Inconsistency	.22	4.3/11	+6.7	14.13	0.001	.03	1.5/2	-0.5	0.25	0.62
Pretence	.15	5.6/11	+5.4	7.24	0.007	.08	3.1/5	-1.9	1.72	0.30
Blame	.24	5.6/14	+8.4	17.42	<.001	.02	2.6/3	-0.4	0.09	0.72
Complacency	.20	3.9/10	+6.1	12.63	.002	.04	1.3/2	-0.7	0.41	0.63
Multi-Dimensional Examples	.40	12.6/32	+19.4	47.25	<.001	.03	5.2/6	-0.8	0.27	0.61

Note: Bold variables are significant at designated p value.

Table 3
Phi Coefficients Amongst Various Forms of Hypocrisy for Self and Others' Hypocrisy for the Different Orders

Forms present in story about self-hypocrisy					
Participants who provided example of self-hypocrisy first (N = 164)	Direct Inconsistency	Indirect Inconsistency	Pretence	Blame	Complacency
Direct Inconsistency	.35***	-.20*	-.12	-.01	-.05
Indirect Inconsistency	-.18*	.22**	.13	.14	-.06
Pretence	.16*	-.12	.17*	.01	.09
Blame	-.01	.04	.12	.21**	-.11
Complacency	-.03	.04	.10	-.04	.05
Forms present in story about others' hypocrisy					
Forms present in story about self-hypocrisy					
Participants who provide examples of others' hypocrisy first (N = 138)	Direct Inconsistency	Indirect Inconsistency	Pretence	Blame	Complacency
Direct Inconsistency	.21*	-.06	-.03	-.04	-.15
Indirect Inconsistency	.01	.14	-.01	.06	.07
Pretence	.02	.04	.12	.19*	-.01
Blame	-.19*	.20*	-.03	.05	.03
Complacency	.14	.05	.13	.10	-.04
Forms present in story about others' hypocrisy					

Note: * p < .05,

** p < .01,

*** p < .001.