

Moral Inconsistency

Daniel A. Effron and Beth Anne Helgason

Organisational Behaviour Subject Area

London Business School

Chapter to appear in *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology, Vol. 66*

Author Note

Address correspondence to Daniel A. Effron, London Business School, Regent's Park,
NW1 4SA, United Kingdom. Email: deffron@london.edu

We have no conflicts of interest to disclose.

Contents

1. Varieties of moral inconsistency
2. Inconsistency among our moral behaviors
 - 2.1 Psychological license as a source of moral inconsistency
 - 2.1.1 Behavioral history as a source of license
 - 2.1.1.1 Moral self-licensing: When doing good frees people to do bad
 - 2.1.1.2 Self-serving interpretations of one's own behavioral history
 - 2.1.1.3 Moral self-licensing without "doing good"
 - 2.1.1.4 Summary: Behavioral history as a source of license
 - 2.1.2 Other people as a source of license
 - 2.1.2.1 Individuals: Receiving "vice advice"
 - 2.1.2.2 Groups: The licensing effect of entitativity
 - 2.1.2.3 Society: License from one-time political events
 - 2.1.2.4 Summary: Other people as a source of license
 - 2.2 Beyond license: Temptation as a source of moral inconsistency
3. Inconsistency among our moral judgment of others' behavior
 - 3.1 Motivation as a source of moral inconsistency
 - 3.2 Imagination as a source of moral inconsistency
 - 3.2.1 Imagination and moral judgments of dishonesty
 - 3.2.2 Imagination and moral judgments of blame
 - 3.2.3 Imagination and moral judgments of hypocrisy
 - 3.2.4 Summary: Imagination as a source of moral inconsistency
 - 3.3 Repetition as a source of moral inconsistency
4. Tolerating others' moral inconsistency
 - 4.1 When inconsistency is not so hypocritical
 - 4.1.1 Order of practicing and preaching
 - 4.1.2 Suffering for misdeeds
 - 4.1.3 Ambiguity of wrongdoing
 - 4.1.4 Culture
 - 4.2 When does inconsistency count as hypocrisy?
 - 4.2.1 The false-signaling theory
 - 4.2.2 The moral-benefits theory
 - 4.3 Summary: Tolerating others' moral inconsistency
5. Discussion
 - 5.1 Don't people hate inconsistency?
 - 5.2.1 Failure to notice inconsistency
 - 5.2.2 Trivializing and tolerating inconsistency
 - 5.2.3 Believing our moral benefits are deserved
 - 5.2 The benefits of moral inconsistency
 - 5.3 Future directions
 - 5.3.1 How do people think about their own versus others' moral inconsistency
 - 5.3.2 Are people more tolerant of moral inconsistency with past behavior or with stated values?
 - 5.3.3 How do people think about moral inconsistencies over long periods of time?
6. Conclusion

Abstract

We review a program of research examining three questions. First, why is the morality of people's behavior inconsistent across time and situations? We point to people's ability to convince themselves they have a license to sin, and we demonstrate various ways people use their behavioral history and others – individuals, groups, and society – to feel licensed. Second, why are people's moral judgments of others' behavior inconsistent? We highlight three factors: motivation, imagination, and repetition. Third, when do people tolerate others who fail to practice what they preach? We argue that people only condemn others' inconsistency as hypocrisy if they think the others are enjoying an “undeserved moral benefit.” Altogether, this program of research suggests that people are surprisingly willing to enact and excuse inconsistency in their moral lives. We discuss how to reconcile this observation with the foundational social psychological principle that people hate inconsistency.

Keywords: Behavioral ethics, moral judgment, inconsistency, hypocrisy, moral licensing, dishonesty, prejudice

People's lives are full of moral inconsistencies. Sometimes, it is our moral behavior that is inconsistent. During the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, behaviors to mitigate the spread of the virus became moralized (Graso et al., 2021; Prosser et al., 2020), yet people did not consistently wear masks or socially distance (Stosic et al., 2021; Yan et al., 2021). Other times, it is our moral judgments that are inconsistent. American politicians on both sides of the political aisle misrepresented information about the pandemic (Goodman & Hakim, 2021; Paz, 2020); the misrepresentations we condemned most harshly probably depended on which side of the aisle we ourselves were on (see Effron & Helgason, 2022). Yet other times, we observe moral inconsistency in others. The pandemic exposed us to a seemingly endless parade of leaders who violated the very COVID-19 lockdowns that they themselves had implemented (Leslie, 2020).

Social psychologists have long emphasized people's aversion to inconsistency. We strive for consistency among our cognitions and social relationships (e.g., Festinger, 1957; Heider, 1958; Osgood & Tannenbaum, 1955), and we hate hypocrites (Gilbert & Jones, 1986; Tedeschi et al., 1971). People should be particularly motivated to maintain consistency in the moral domain because moral principles are defined, in part, by their universal, inviolable nature (Skitka et al., 2005; Turiel, 1977). Yet, as the opening examples illustrate, inconsistency appears common in our moral lives. Pandemics aside, our behavior is neither consistently saintly nor sinful (e.g., Hofmann et al., 2014), and we inconsistently apply our moral principles when judging others (e.g., Bucciarelli et al., 2008; Campbell, 2017; Ditto et al., 2009). We also frequently encounter people who fail to practice what they preach (Hale & Pillow, 2015) – an inconsistency that we sometimes condemn as hypocrisy, but other times are willing to tolerate (e.g., Effron & Miller, 2015; Jordan et al., 2017).

Why do we display moral inconsistencies in our behavior and judgments – and why do we sometimes condone such inconsistencies in others? The present chapter reviews a program of our research that investigates these questions. We group the findings into three topics.

The first topic considers why people's moral behavior can be so inconsistent across time and situations. The main explanation our research has focused on is that people are adept at licensing themselves to sin. Early work on this explanation examined how doing good can license people to do bad. Subsequent work examined how people strategically distort the way they think about their behavioral history when they anticipate needing a license. More-recent work examines other people as a source of license; specifically, how the advice we receive from individuals, the membership we hold in certain groups, and the political events that occur in our society can promote moral inconsistency. We end this section with a discussion of how moral inconsistency can also result from fluctuations in the strength of temptation.

The second topic considers why people's moral judgments of *others'* behavior can be so inconsistent across time and situations. Our research on this topic has examined three psychological factors – motivation, imagination, and repetition – which we will discuss in separate sections. The section on motivation shows how people pass more-lenient judgments on themselves, ingroup members, and political allies than they pass on others, outgroup members, and political opponents. The section on imagination reveals how mentally simulating what could have happened in the past or what might unfold in the future facilitates morally inconsistent patterns of judgments. Finally, the section on repetition reveals how our moral judgments of a wrongdoing may become more lenient over time, simply because we have been repeatedly exposed to it.

The third topic considers when and why we are inclined to condone others' moral inconsistency. Our focus here is on a type of moral inconsistency that often gets condemned as hypocrisy: failing to practice what you preach. We review evidence that, despite hating hypocrisy, people are sometimes willing to tolerate those who fail to practice what they preach. We explain this pattern of results by suggesting that people will only condemn moral inconsistency as hypocrisy if they perceive the inconsistency as an attempt to claim a benefit to which one is not morally entitled.

Together, our studies on these topics reveal how a variety of psychological processes lead us to act inconsistently, to judge others inconsistently, and even to tolerate others' inconsistency, in the moral domain. Despite our general distaste for inconsistency, we may frequently enact and condone inconsistency in our moral lives.

1. Varieties of moral inconsistency

The present chapter considers two types of moral inconsistency. First, moral inconsistency among *behaviors* occurs when people do not act consistently virtuous across time or situations. For example, a person might refrain from cheating unless the spoils are split with someone else (Gino et al., 2013; Wiltermuth, 2011), or until a point in the day when they feel fatigued (e.g., Barnes et al., 2011). Note that we consider speech acts to be one type of behavior. Thus, moral inconsistencies among behaviors include failures to practice what you preach (e.g., Stone & Fernandez, 2008), or other cases of "word-deed misalignment" in the moral domain (Efron, O'Connor, et al., 2018; Simons, 2002), such as when a manager violates safety regulations despite espousing the importance of safety (Leroy et al., 2012).

Second, moral inconsistency among *judgments* occurs when people evaluate the same moral behavior differently depending on the situation (see Campbell, 2017). For example,

research has examined inconsistencies in people's judgments about the morality of sacrificing someone for the greater good (e.g., Duke & Bègue, 2015; Greene et al., 2008; Greene et al., 2001). Other work suggests that the same transgression seems more wrong when it harms a single identifiable victim rather than a group or an anonymous victim (Gino et al., 2010; Kogut & Ritov, 2015; Nordgren & McDonnell, 2011).

Of course, not all examples of inconsistency constitute *moral* inconsistency. A person might choose to play soccer sometimes and golf other times (inconsistency among behaviors), or evaluate soccer players as superior athletes to golfers sometimes and vice versa other times (inconsistency among judgments). These types of inconsistency only become moral inconsistency if the judgments and behaviors in question are considered relevant to issues of right and wrong. Thus, if the person in question viewed playing golf as less moral than playing soccer (e.g., because of the environmental damage caused by golf courses), then inconsistency in choice of sports would constitute moral inconsistency.

Although we focus on moral inconsistency, many of the psychological processes we will describe apply to inconsistencies in people's judgments and choices about vices (Milkman et al., 2008) – behaviors like smoking, gambling, or unhealthy eating – that are “morality-adjacent,” or may even become moralized (Gai & Bhattacharjee, in press; Rozin & Singh, 1999), but that many people would not consider morally relevant. For instance, similar psychological mechanisms may underlie inconsistencies in our judgments about smoking and shopping as in our judgments about stealing and sexism (see Effron, 2016; Effron & Miller, 2015; Khan & Dhar, 2006).

Before we proceed, a brief note on methodology. Some studies of moral inconsistency document such inconsistency within the same individual (e.g., Garrett et al., 2016; Hofmann et

al., 2014; Welsh et al., 2015). For example, participants presented with a series of opportunities to get away with cheating were more likely to cheat on the last opportunity (Effron, Bryan, et al., 2015). However, most studies infer moral inconsistency from between-participants experiments. These studies do not directly observe any one individual displaying moral inconsistency, but differences between randomly assigned conditions reveal moral inconsistency across situations at the aggregate level.

Having specified the varieties of moral inconsistency we will consider, we now turn to the three main questions that have driven our research: Why is people's moral behavior inconsistent, why are their moral judgments of others' behavior inconsistent, and why do they sometimes condone others' moral inconsistency?

2. Inconsistency among our moral behaviors

Why is people's moral behavior inconsistent across time and situations? One answer from the behavioral ethics literature is that people are "boundedly ethical" – they care about doing the right thing, but fall prey to a variety of cognitive biases that blind them to the fact that they are crossing the ethical line (Bazerman & Sezer, 2016; Bazerman & Tenbrunsel, 2011; Chugh et al., 2005; Chugh & Kern, 2016; Tenbrunsel & Messick, 2004). For example, when making a business decision, managers may focus only on the financial implications without considering the ethical implications. In this view, people display moral inconsistency across situations because different situations are more or less conducive to bias. For example, people may be less likely to consider the ethical implications of decisions they are facing in the present than decisions they expect to face in the future (Tenbrunsel et al., 2010).

A different answer points to self-control failures (Barnes et al., 2011; Christian & Ellis, 2011; Gino et al., 2011; Hofmann et al., 2018; Mead et al., 2009). From this perspective,

resisting temptation requires mental effort, which is a limited resource; once this resource is depleted, people will be more likely to succumb to unethical impulses (for a critical review, see Inzlicht & Friese, 2019). In this view, people's moral behavior is inconsistent across time and situations because their self-control fluctuates. For example, people may act more ethically during the time of day when they feel most awake and are thus best able to exercise self-control (Gunia et al., 2014; Kouchaki & Smith, 2014).

Our own research has focused on a third answer: Moral inconsistency arises because people are adept at granting themselves a license to sin. In other words, they have a variety of strategies for convincing themselves that it is okay to act on their temptations to engage in morally questionable behavior. Our research on this topic began by examining how people use their own behavioral history as a source of license, and later expanded to consider how they derive license from other people, at the level of individuals, groups, and society. We have also examined how, even when people have not convinced themselves they are licensed to sin, moral inconsistency can arise from fluctuations in temptations across time. The next sections review our research on these topics.

2.1 Psychological license as a source of moral inconsistency

When faced with an ethical temptation, people ask themselves, in effect, "Can I do what I want in this situation without feeling or appearing like a bad person?" (Effron, 2016). If they can answer *yes* to this question, they become more likely to succumb to the temptation; otherwise, they tend to inhibit themselves from acting unethically. More broadly, when people perceive they have the ability to take an action or express a view without discrediting themselves in their own eyes or others, they have *psychological license* to take that action or to express that view

(Miller & Effron, 2010). From this perspective, people's behavior is morally inconsistent when they move in and out of situations that provide different degrees of license.

The concept of psychological license offers a perspective on moral inconsistency that has informed and been informed by key themes in the behavioral ethics literature. This perspective starts with the premise that the desire to feel and appear virtuous often inhibits people from succumbing to ethical temptations (Batson, 2002; Bryan et al., 2013; Mazar et al., 2008). It embraces the idea that people are good at generating justifications for their behavior and displaying flexibility in their thinking about morality (Ayal & Gino, 2012; Bandura, 1999; Bartels et al., 2015; Kouchaki & Gino, 2016), and it highlights that people often generate these justifications in advance of acting (Barkan et al., 2015; Shalvi et al., 2015). At the same time, the psychological-license perspective differs from the other perspectives on moral inconsistency previously discussed. The bounded-ethicality perspective (e.g., Chugh et al., 2005) and the self-control perspective (e.g., Mead et al., 2009) depict people as unintentionally or impulsively succumbing to ethical temptations. By contrast, the psychological-license perspective depicts people as carefully (though not objectively) considering the implications of their behavior for their self-image before they act. This licensing perspective suggests that people are less ethically blind and weak-willed – and more strategic (e.g., Merritt et al., 2012) – than the other perspectives suggest. Although blind spots and self-control failures certainly explain some moral inconsistencies, these perspectives are incomplete without considering how people license themselves to sin.

We next consider two general factors that can make people feel licensed: their behavioral history (i.e., the ways they imagine they have proven their virtue), and other people (i.e., the

individuals they interact with, the groups in which they hold membership, and the societal events that they witness).

2.1.1 Behavioral history as a source of license

2.1.1.1 Moral self-licensing: When doing good frees people to do bad

One source of license is people's behavioral history. People feel less obligated to inhibit themselves from resisting ethical temptations when they can point to evidence of their morality. Thus, doing good can license people to do bad, a phenomenon called *moral self-licensing* (Merritt et al., 2010; Monin & Miller, 2001). The idea is that a virtuous track record can make people feel they have "proven" their morality and hence they can deviate from the straight and narrow without feeling or appearing like a bad person (for a review, see Effron & Conway, 2015).

Research provides numerous examples of this phenomenon (e.g., Bradley-Geist et al., 2010; Brown et al., 2011; Jordan et al., 2011; Kouchaki, 2011; Mann & Kawakami, 2012). Early studies suggested that rejecting sexist statements could license people to subsequently favor men over women (Monin & Miller, 2001), that endorsing Obama in 2008 could license his supporters to express ambiguously racist views (Effron et al., 2009), that imagining doing good deeds can license cheating (Clot et al., 2014), and that agreeing to help a foreign student could license people to make indulgent purchases (Khan & Dhar, 2006). Subsequent work applied the idea of moral self-licensing to organizational contexts (see Klotz & Bolino, 2013). For example, studies have examined how performing ethical leadership behaviors can license managers to treat employees less respectfully (Lin et al., 2016), how compelling employees to help their organization can increase their deviant workplace behavior (Yam et al., 2017), and how working for a socially responsible organization can lead people to shirk (List & Momeni, 2021). These

studies offer striking examples of moral inconsistency, in which people's behavior becomes less-virtuous precisely *because* they have just acted more virtuously. Apparently, the ability to point to a virtuous behavioral history removes inhibition against acting less virtuously by making people feel secure about their own morality (Monin & Jordan, 2009).

We have argued that moral self-licensing can occur via two specific mechanisms, which can operate in tandem (Effron & Monin, 2010; Miller & Effron, 2010). First, good deeds can earn people “moral credits” that can be exchanged for the right to commit even blatant bad deeds. The metaphor is that people maintain a moral bank account; good deeds “deposit” moral credits whereas bad deeds “spend” moral credits, and people will feel licensed to sin so long as they do not spend more than they have deposited (Nisan, 1991). Second, good deeds can grant people “moral credentials” that allow them to interpret subsequent, ambiguous behavior as less morally problematic (Monin & Miller, 2001). Thus, endorsing Obama – the first Black nominee from a major U.S. political party – may have made Democrats in 2009 feel they had established “non-racist credentials,” which allow them to express ambiguous views that *could* seem racist without worrying that those views will actually feel or appear racist (Effron et al., 2009). A similar psychology operates when someone says “some of my best friends are Black” before telling a joke that plays on racial stereotypes; the person's hope is that telling the joke will seem less racist after they have “proven” themselves to be non-racist (Thai et al., 2016).

Recent work on moral self-licensing effects has focused on their replicability, generalizability, and boundary conditions. One of the original demonstrations of moral self-licensing (Monin & Miller, 2001) was replicated in a high-powered, pre-registered study (Ebersole et al., 2016), albeit with a much smaller effect size. Specifically, an opportunity to reject blatantly sexist statements increased the likelihood that participants would say they

preferred to hire a man for a stereotypically masculine job. However, other demonstrations of licensing have not replicated. Urban et al. (2019) found no evidence that deciding to purchase environmentally beneficial products licensed lying, cheating and stealing (cf. Mazar & Zhong, 2010); Blanken et al. (2014) found no evidence that writing about the self using positive words made people donate less money to charity (cf. Sachdeva et al., 2009); similarly, Rotella and Barclay (2020) failed to replicate the finding that reflecting on one's past moral behavior reduced charitable donations (cf. Conway & Peetz, 2012).

One reason why these effects have failed to replicate may be that some of the original demonstrations were false positives. Meta-analyses have suggested that moral-licensing effects are reliable on average, but are smaller than previously believed, suggesting that many of the early studies were underpowered (Blanken et al., 2015; Kuper & Bott, 2019; Simbrunner & Schlegelmilch, 2017). Another reason is that licensing theory has inadequately specified the conditions under which licensing will occur. When will doing good lead to doing bad – and when will it instead lead to doing more good (e.g., Reed et al., 2007)? Several moderators have been tested (Brown et al., 2011; Conway & Peetz, 2012; Cornelissen et al., 2013; Effron et al., 2009; Effron et al., 2012; Gholamzadehmir et al., 2019; Griep et al., 2021; Schwabe et al., 2018; Susewind & Hoelzl, 2014), but the literature has yet to provide a clear or consistent answer (see Mullen & Monin, 2016), again in part because these tests were likely underpowered.

Consider that the significant licensing effect size observed in the pre-registered replication of Monin & Miller (2001) was $d = .14$ (Ebersole et al., 2016). To obtain 80% power to detect a mean difference of this size between two experimental conditions at $p < .05$, two-tailed, would require 1,604 participants total (Faul et al., 2007). To detect a statistical interaction that completely attenuates a licensing effect of this size in a 2x2 factorial design would require

6,416 participants total (Simonsohn, 2014) – far more than the typical study in this literature. (Even if we instead use a much-larger effect size as a benchmark – Blanken et al.’s estimate of $d = .31$ for the average moral-licensing effect – the same design would still require 2,640 participants to detect this interaction). Given the practical difficulties with recruiting such large samples, we suggest that researchers suspend the search for new moderators of moral self-licensing until the field has conducted more high-powered, pre-registered studies to identify the (two-cell) paradigms in which moral self-licensing effects reliably occur.

These considerations have informed our own recent research on moral self-licensing. Based on the finding that endorsing Obama in 2008 licensed his supporters to favor Whites over Blacks (Effron et al., 2009), we tested the hypothesis that endorsing a female candidate for president in the 2020 U.S. Democratic primaries would license Democrats to favor men over women on a hypothetical hiring task (Giurge et al., 2021). We expected that endorsing a woman for president would make participants feel that they had established non-sexist credentials that would allow them to express an ambiguously sexist preference without feeling too sexist. However, two pre-registered studies, each designed to detect an effect size of $d = .14$ with 85% power, failed to confirm this hypothesis. Why? A speculative, post hoc explanation is that Democrats in 2020 did not feel that endorsing a woman for president sufficiently proved their lack of sexism to license an ambiguously sexist view. Whereas endorsing a Black candidate in 2009 may have made some Democrats feel that they were contributing to historic progress towards American racial equality, Hillary Clinton’s loss of the presidential election to Donald Trump in 2016 may have made Democrats in 2020 feel that establishing non-sexist credentials requires doing more than merely stating support for a candidate. It is difficult to evaluate this explanation given that licensing theory does not clearly specify what behaviors people will

“count” as a license. Thus, this null effect highlights the need for further theoretical developments, and more high-powered empirical work to establish the conditions under which moral self-licensing occurs.

In short, it appears that doing good can sometimes reliably license people to do bad (Ebersole et al., 2016), and this moral self-licensing effect offers one explanation for moral inconsistency across time. However, recent evidence suggests the effect size is smaller than the early studies suggested, and the boundaries are poorly understood (Giurge et al., 2021; Mullen & Monin, 2016).

Beyond the claim that doing good can free people to do bad, our work on moral self-licensing has yielded two additional insights that shed light on moral inconsistency (see Effron, 2016; Effron & Conway, 2015): People display self-serving biases when determining how thoroughly they have proven their morality, and people can feel licensed to sin without actually doing good deeds. Our findings suggest that people’s behavior may be morally inconsistent across time not only when their behavioral history contains virtuous behavior, but merely when their behavioral history affords them the opportunity to *convince themselves* that they have proven their virtuousness. We present these findings in the next two sections.

2.1.1.2 Self-serving interpretations of one’s own behavioral history

How virtuous should you feel for donating \$100 to charity? How much moral credit will others give you for dropping 50 cents in a homeless person’s cup? People tend to generate self-serving answers to these questions. The research on moral self-licensing suggests that people act in a morally inconsistent manner when they feel their behavioral history has proven their virtue. We now consider research suggesting that it may not take much for people to feel that they have such proof.

We asked online participants in one study to estimate how much \$100 would help various charities (Polman et al., 2018, Study 9). By random assignment, half of the participants were told the money belonged to them, whereas the other half were told it belonged to someone else. The results showed that people thought that their own \$100 could do more good than another person's \$100. For example, they thought their own money could save more dogs at a pet shelter, plant more trees in the Amazon, and buy more books for children in developing countries than the same amount of someone else's money.

This result is not unique to the moral domain; people also think their own money can buy more products than the same amount of someone else's money (Polman et al., 2018). Nonetheless, the result suggests that people may give themselves more moral credit for their good deeds than observers think they deserve – and perhaps consequently, feel more licensed to deviate from the straight and narrow than observers think they should feel. Prior work suggests that people feel holier than others because they overestimate how virtuously they will act in the future (Epley & Dunning, 2000), and give themselves (vs. others) more credit for good intentions (Kruger & Gilovich, 2004; White & Plous, 1995). Our finding suggests another reason: People may believe that the same behavior does more good when they perform it than when someone else does.

People may be particularly likely to regard their behavioral history as virtuous when they feel that their morality is in question – that is, when they experience threats to their moral self-image. For example, in one study participants had to choose one of two tasks to complete: a fun “charity game,” in which they could raise up to \$0.50 for a good cause by answering easy general-knowledge questions, or a boring visual-attention task in which they would search a 1,600-character matrix for letter sequences while memorizing a 13-digit number (Effron, 2014).

Unsurprisingly, everyone chose to play the charity game – a “good deed” that is, at best, only ambiguously diagnostic of one’s moral character. Then, by random assignment, half the participants learned that they would soon be taking a difficult morality test which had the potential to reveal that they are less moral than they think. The aim of this condition was to make people anticipate a threat to their moral self-image. The other half of participants instead learned that they would merely be examining another person’s score on the morality test – a condition which should pose no threat to participants’ moral self-image. Finally, for the dependent measure, participants estimated what an objective observer would think about their earlier choice of the charity game over the visual-attention task. Specifically, how much did they think an observer would view this (trivially virtuous) choice as diagnostic of participants’ moral character?

The results showed that participants expected their choice to seem more diagnostic when they expected to take the morality test themselves – but only among people who cared most about maintaining a moral self-image (Aquino & Reed, 2002) and thus said they actually felt threatened by the prospect of taking the test. In other words, the anticipated threat of seeming less moral in the future led these participants to be more confident that a past choice had proven their morality to others. In this way, when people wanted proof of their morality, they made a mountain of morality from a molehill of virtue. One consequence of this phenomenon is that, when people feel their moral character is threatened, they overestimate how impressive their moral track record will seem to others (Effron, 2014).

Thus, people’s thinking about their moral track record appears to be quite flexible. They give themselves more credit for charitable behavior than they would give others (Polman et al., 2018), and when they worry their future behavior could make them feel less moral, they

overestimate how much credit they will receive from others for a virtuous choice (Effron, 2014). These phenomena could help explain why people seem to feel licensed to act less virtuously after doing a “good deed” that is only trivially virtuous (e.g., indicating disagreement with blatantly sexist statements; saying one would be helpful in a hypothetical situation; Khan & Dhar, 2006; Monin & Miller, 2001). Trivially virtuous behaviors may seem like solid evidence of moral character when the behavior was yours and when you need such evidence (see also van de Ven et al., 2018). In this view, people may quickly move from doing good to doing bad – a pattern of moral inconsistency – in part because they interpret the good they have done in a self-serving way.

However, these self-serving interpretations of good deeds will not always lead people to do bad ones. Theoretically, good deeds license bad ones when people (a) initially feel tempted to do the bad deeds, (b) simultaneously feel inhibited from doing the bad deeds, and then (c) subsequently interpret their good deeds as sufficient evidence of virtue to remove this inhibition (see Giurge et al., 2021). If you are not particularly tempted to do a bad deed, or if the inhibition against doing it is too great for the good deeds to remove, then the good deed should not license the bad one, even if you interpret the good deed in a self-serving way. For example, you might think your \$0.50 charity donation was more virtuous than another person’s \$0.50 donation (Polman et al., 2018), and you might overestimate how impressed others would be by your donation (Effron, 2014) – but would your donation increase the likelihood that you would shoplift if you could get away with it? Probably not if you had little desire to shoplift to begin with (low temptation), or if you thought that shoplifting was so immoral that even your “highly virtuous” donation cannot justify it (high inhibition). People may make mountains of morality from molehills of virtue, but not all mountains are big enough to overshadow all wrongdoings.

2.1.1.3 Moral self-licensing without “doing good”

We have just seen how people are skilled at perceiving their past behavior as evidence of their morality, which could sometimes allow them to feel licensed based on trivially virtuous behaviors. However, feeling licensed does not even require doing good deeds at all (see Effron, 2016; Effron & Conway, 2015). Consider a dark example. Joseph Fritzl kept his daughter locked in his basement for decades, subjecting her to the worst kind of physical, emotional, and sexual abuse. When Fritzl was finally apprehended and tried for his crimes, he explained, “I could have behaved a lot worse than locking up my daughter” (Harrell, 2008). Apparently, Fritzl felt licensed to abuse his daughter – not because he had done anything particularly virtuous in his life, but because he simply reflected on all the transgressions he *could have* committed, but did not actually commit. In other words, he reflected on what we have called *counterfactual transgressions* (Efron et al., 2012).

Most people’s behavior will not approach Fritzl’s level of depravity, but people may nonetheless use counterfactual transgressions to license the moral inconsistencies in everyday life. For example, White participants were more likely to express ambiguously racist views after they had been given a chance – which they all declined to take – to make a blatantly racist judgment (Efron et al., 2012). Outside the moral domain, dieters expressed weaker intentions to stick to their diets over the next week when they were randomly assigned to reflect on unhealthy alternatives to their recent behavior (e.g., all the fattening foods they could eat, but declined to eat) than when randomly assigned to a control task (Efron et al., 2013). One week later, the dieters who had reflected on unhealthy alternatives said they had actually done less to diet and still intended to do less than dieters in the control condition. In this way, reflecting on the “sinful road not taken” can license people to deviate from the path to virtue. People often strive to

convince themselves that their behavior is not as bad as what *others* have done (e.g., Bandura, 1999), but counterfactual transgressions offer more flexibility. Even when people cannot point to others who are worse, they can imagine how their own behavior *could have been* worse.

People may find this licensing strategy so appealing that when they anticipate needing a license, they strategically imagine passing up bad deeds that they never actually had an opportunity to perform. For example, when White participants were made to feel more (vs. less) concerned about appearing racist in the future, they overestimated the number of opportunities they had (and passed up) to accuse innocent Black suspects of crimes in the past. In other words, they invented “racist roads not taken” that did not actually exist (Effron et al., 2012). When dieters were faced with the prospect of eating tempting but unhealthy cookies (compared to when they merely saw but could not eat the cookies), they rated foods that they had previously declined to eat (but not foods they had previously eaten) as healthier (Effron et al., 2013). In this way, imagination offers a degree of freedom people can exploit to convince themselves that they have a license to sin. It can be difficult to convince yourself that you have done good deeds you have never actually done; it may be easier to convince yourselves that you declined to do bad deeds that you never had an opportunity to do.

People not only can license themselves by inventing bad behaviors they *could have* performed, but did not (i.e., counterfactual transgressions); they can also feel licensed by committing to *prefactual virtues* (see Effron, 2016) – good behaviors they plan to perform, but have not (yet) performed. For example, after saying that they would donate blood at a later date, participants became more likely to express prejudiced views (Cascio & Plant, 2015). Apparently, the prospect of donating blood in the future made participants feel they had earned moral credits that they could spend in the present on expressing their prejudices. One concern is that people

will borrow moral credits from good deeds they intend to perform in the future, but then renege on the loan by never actually doing those good deeds (Khan & Dhar, 2007).

The work on counterfactual transgressions and prefactual virtues shows how people can feel licensed to sin without actually doing good deeds. They can simply imagine foregone bad deeds in their past or intended good deeds in their future. This work highlights a theme that we will return to later: The flexibility of people's imagination facilitates the inconsistency of their moral behavior.

2.1.1.4 Summary: Behavioral history as a source of license

One reason that people's moral behavior can be inconsistent across time is that they use their behavioral history as a license. In examining this moral self-licensing phenomenon, we have highlighted three key points from our research: doing good can sometimes lead people to do bad, people form self-serving beliefs about how good their behavioral history has been, and people can use their imaginations (e.g., inventing counterfactual transgression) to derive a license from their behavioral history without actually doing good. In short, believing one has established a virtuous track record can make people feel more secure about their moral standing, which can disinhibit them to act on morally questionable temptations.

2.1.2. Other people as a source of license

The explanation for moral inconsistency we have considered thus far is fundamentally intrapersonal: People's own behavioral history provides evidence of their virtue, which in turn increases their comfort taking tempting but morally questionable actions. We now consider an explanation for moral inconsistency that is fundamentally *interpersonal*: The morality of one's behavior varies across time and situations because of other people.

Familiar social-psychological processes offer some examples (Moore & Gino, 2013). A person who previously acted virtuously might suddenly cross the ethical line because they are following the crowd (Gino, 2015), emulating a leader (Mayer et al., 2009; Treviño & Brown, 2005), imitating a close other (Gino & Galinsky, 2012), or obeying authority (Milgram, 1974). In these examples, other people motivate or compel morally questionable behavior. The metaphor is that other people can push us over the ethical line.

By contrast, our research has focused on how other people disinhibit unethical behavior by increasing one's comfort acting on our existing motivations. The metaphor is that other people can remove psychological barriers that were restraining us from crossing the ethical line. In other words, other people are a source of psychological license. We will discuss how advice from individuals can license people to lie (Helgason & Effron, in progress), how perceiving our racial group as a tightly-knit unit can license people to express prejudice (Effron & Knowles, 2015), and how one-time socio-political events may license people to express sexism (Georgeac et al., 2019).

We describe other people as having a *licensing effect* because they can make one feel free to take a questionable action or express a questionable view without worrying about discrediting oneself (see Miller & Effron, 2010). However, the nature of this license is different here than in *moral self-licensing effects*, discussed earlier. Moral self-licensing occurs when people feel free to act less-than-virtuously *specifically because they can point to evidence of their virtuous character* (Effron, 2016; Effron & Conway, 2015), but it is not the only type of licensing effect (Effron & Miller, 2012; Miller & Effron, 2010; Miller et al., 2009; Zitek et al., 2010). In the licensing effects we consider next, people feel free to act less-than virtuously because they can

point to seemingly legitimate reasons for doing so: “I was simply following advice,” “I wanted to help my group,” or “this behavior is socially acceptable.”

2.1.2.1 Individuals: Receiving “vice advice”

When making decisions, people often receive advice from others. Parents receive childrearing advice from other parents, consumers receive purchasing advice from friends, and executives receive business advice from consultants. Past research examines how people use advice to make more accurate decisions (e.g., Bonaccio & Dalal, 2006; Snizek et al., 2004; Soll & Larrick, 2009). For example, pharmaceutical executives might hire consultants to improve their estimates of how large the market will be for a new drug. Our research suggests that people also use advice as a license to make ethically questionable decisions, leading to moral inconsistency. Pharmaceutical executives might show some restraint in marketing an addictive opioid until advised by a consultancy to “turbocharge” its sales (see Forsythe & Bogdanich, 2021). Advice to do something morally questionable could make people feel that they have a legitimate reason to succumb to temptation – they need not feel or appear as immoral because they were just doing what someone else suggested. If people use advice as a license to succumb to temptation, then they should be more likely to listen to advisors who suggest they succumb than to advisors who suggest they resist – particularly when the temptation to succumb is strong. We tested these ideas in a series of studies (Helgason & Effron, in progress).

In one study, we examined how advice might affect people’s behavior when they faced a conflict of interest. Participants had to estimate the number of dots in each of several arrays. We told them it was important to estimate accurately, but also gave them an incentive to overestimate (adapted from Sah & Loewenstein, 2014). The more dots they said there were, the

higher the chances of winning a prize (either \$5 or \$200, depending on randomly assigned condition). Thus, we expected participants to feel obligated to be honest but tempted to lie.

Participants viewed each dot array, indicated their initial estimate, received advice ostensibly from another participant, and then made a final estimate that could respond to the advice as much or as little as they wanted. In reality, we programmed the advice to be a pre-determined distance from participants' initial estimate. On some trials, participants received *vice advice* – that is, the other participant suggested they raise their estimates to a specific number, thereby increasing their chance of winning a prize. On other trials, they received *virtue advice* – that is, the other participant suggested they *lower* their estimates to a specific number, thereby *decreasing* their chance of winning. The dependent measure was the amount participants changed their initial estimate after receiving advice (i.e., the weight of advice; Yaniv & Kleinberger, 2000).

Several results illustrate that receiving advice made participants morally inconsistent by licensing them to lie (Helgason & Effron, in progress). First, participants gave higher estimates after (vs. before) receiving vice advice. Because higher estimates increased participants' chances of winning the prize, this result could reflect a pattern of moral inconsistency: remaining fairly honest until one receives advice that justifies lying. Second, in support of this interpretation, people gave more weight to advice that justified lying than advice that did not. Specifically, participants adjusted their initial estimate towards the advice to a greater extent when the advice suggested estimating higher (i.e., increasing their chances of winning the prize) than when it suggested estimating lower (i.e., decreasing their chances of winning). In other words, moral inconsistency was more likely to result from vice advice than from virtue advice. If participants were only motivated to be accurate or to learn from another person's estimate, it is unclear why

they would have taken vice advice more than virtue advice. Instead, we argue, participants gave extra weight to vice advice because it licensed them to over-report without feeling too dishonest.

Third, this tendency to weight vice advice more than virtue advice was particularly pronounced when the prize was \$200 instead of \$5 – a result that supports the idea that people used vice advice as a license. Psychological license works by disinhibiting people to succumb to temptations (Miller & Effron, 2010). If people are not particularly tempted to lie, then they should be unlikely to do so regardless of whether they feel licensed; when people are highly tempted to lie, they should be much more likely to do so when they do versus do not feel licensed. Thus, the result that advice had a larger effect on people's estimates when the prize was more tempting (\$200) than when it was less tempting (\$5) suggests that people used vice advice as a license. In other words, receiving advice did not simply motivate participants to conform to the advisors' preferences; instead, the advice disinhibited participants to act on pre-existing temptations to lie.

Another study provides further evidence of the licensing power of vice advice in a very different context (Helgason & Effron, in progress). We recruited White Americans for a hiring task, and asked them to estimate the IQ scores for each of several Black job applicants. We expected participants with different racial attitudes to experience this situation differently. Participants with more-negative attitudes towards Black people might be motivated to rate the Black applicants as having relatively low IQ scores – but at the same time, these participants might worry that giving low estimates of the applicants' intelligence would make them look racist. As a result, these participants might rate each applicant higher than they wanted to – unless they had a license to express their desired estimates. By contrast, those with more-positive attitudes towards Black people should be less motivated to rate the Black applicants as having

low IQ scores. Thus, giving them a license to express their true beliefs should have little effect on their estimates.

We expected that advice from a third party about what IQ score to estimate might provide this license. In support of this prediction, participants gave lower IQ estimates after (vs. before) receiving advice to lower their IQ scores. The moral inconsistency here is that participants are giving more racially fraught responses after receiving advice. Suggesting that this result emerged because participants used advice as a license to express their prejudice – and not because participants impartially took any advice they received – participants took advice significantly more when it suggested decreasing (vs. increasing) their IQ estimates, and these results emerged *only* among participants with more-negative attitudes towards Black people. Presumably, participants with more-positive attitudes towards Black people were not tempted to give low estimates of the Black applicants' IQ to begin with, and thus did not use the third party's advice as a license. These findings are consistent with the hypothesis that advice frees people to reveal their racial prejudices rather than changing those prejudices. More broadly, advice may provide license to make tempting but unseemly choices, resulting in morally inconsistent behavior depending on whether people can justify a choice by pointing to others' advice.

2.1.2.2 Groups: The licensing effect of entitativity

Our research on advice shows that people will strategically use the opinion of a single individual as a license to act in morally questionable ways. In other work, we examine how people look not only to individuals who advise them, but also to the social groups they are a part of, to license anti-outgroup prejudice. Here, the moral inconsistency is that people will tend to conceal their prejudices unless they can point to their membership in a particular social group.

A key dimension on which people perceive social groups is *entitativity* – how much of a single, unified entity the group appears to be (Campbell, 1958; Hamilton & Sherman, 1996). People differ in how entitative they perceive their social group. For example, some White Americans consider their racial group to be highly entitative, believing that they have a shared history, similar values, collective interests, and form a group with clear boundaries. Other White Americans disagree, believing instead that their racial group is a loose amalgam of many different ethnicities, some of which have not always been considered “White,” which have a diversity of political views, religious beliefs, and socioeconomic statuses, and which lack a single set of collective interests.

Our research suggests that ingroup entitativity is a source of license. Specifically, when people perceive their own ingroup as highly entitative, they feel more comfortable publicly expressing their private prejudice against outgroups. In one study, for example, White university students responded to both an implicit and explicit measure of anti-Black bias (Effron & Knowles, 2015, Study 5). Because implicit measures are not as influenced by social desirability concerns as explicit measures (Hofmann et al., 2005), we reasoned that the association between the implicit and explicit measures would vary as a function of how licensed participants felt. When people perceive themselves as unlicensed, they should try to express little explicit prejudice regardless of how much implicit prejudice they feel. By contrast, when people perceive themselves as licensed, they should feel more comfortable publicly expressing any prejudices they privately hold, resulting in a higher positive correlation between the implicit and explicit measures.

Consistent with this logic, the stronger a preference participants showed for White people over Black people on the implicit measure, the more anti-Black prejudice they endorsed on the

explicit measure – but only among participants who viewed their own racial group as highly entitative (see Figure 1). Those who did not perceive their racial group as entitative expressed little anti-Black prejudice on the explicit measure, regardless of their levels of implicit bias. This pattern of results is exactly what one would expect if entitativity licensed, without motivating, prejudice.

We argued that these findings emerged because people expect observers to find prejudice more socially acceptable if it is expressed by someone who holds membership in a more- (vs. less-) entitative group. For this reason, members of entitative groups may have felt emboldened to reveal their prejudices. In other studies, we find evidence that observers do judge prejudice as more socially acceptable when it comes from a members of a more-entitative group, and we found support for two explanations (Effron, Kakkar, et al., 2018; Effron & Knowles, 2015).

First, people make different attributions about prejudice when expressed by members of groups that are high versus low in entitativity (Effron & Knowles, 2015). Prejudice is generally considered illegitimate, but some reasons for expressing prejudice are seen as less illegitimate than others. Consider someone who says he hates immigrants. If people assume he expresses this hatred because he believes immigrants are stupid and lazy, they are likely to condemn his prejudice. However, if they assume he expresses this hatred because he believes that immigrants are taking away jobs from people like him, they might not condemn his prejudice quite as harshly. This example illustrates that prejudice may seem slightly less socially unacceptable when it seems “rationalistic” – motivated by a desire to defend or promote the ingroup’s collective interests – than when it seems motivated by irrational hatred. Because, by definition, highly entitative groups have clearer collective interests than less-entitative groups (Crump et al.,

2010), observers are more likely to attribute an individual's prejudice to a collective-interest-defense motive when the prejudiced individual holds membership in an entitative group.

The second reason is that the more entitative a group seems, the more responsible the group will hold it for its members' wrongdoing (Denson et al., 2006; Effron et al., in press; Lickel et al., 2003; Sjöström & Gollwitzer, 2015; Stenstrom et al., 2008). These collective responsibility perceptions arise, in part, because members of entitative groups interact with and influence each other, and coordinate their behavior towards common goals (see Lickel & Onuki, 2015). Thus, if a member of an entitative group expresses prejudice, observers may be inclined to blame the group while excusing the individual member; anticipating observers' reactions, group members themselves may feel emboldened to express prejudice (Effron, Kakkar, et al., 2018).

Regardless of the mechanism, the licensing effect of entitative-group membership may promote moral inconsistency in the domain of prejudice because perceptions of a group's entitativity are malleable (Effron & Knowles, 2015). Situations that lead people to think about their group as a coherent, unified entity may liberate them to publicly express prejudices that they would otherwise keep private. For example, cable-news pundits regularly remind White Americans that their status as a demographic majority in the United States is eroding (see, e.g., BBC News, 2018; The New York Times, 2022) – a reminder that could make them regard White Americans as a more-entitative group (Voci, 2006). Reminders of changing demographics may not only stoke feelings of threat and hostility among White Americans (Craig & Richeson, 2014), but also make them feel increasingly licensed over time to express their pre-existing prejudices against other racial groups (Effron & Knowles, 2015).

2.1.2.3 Society: License from one-time political events

Thus far, we have discussed two ways in which other people can be a source of license: People feel licensed to be dishonest when they receive “vice advice” from an individual (Helgason & Effron, in progress), and feel licensed to express their prejudices when they hold membership in an entitative group (Effron & Knowles, 2015). Moving from the level of the individual and the group to the level of society, we now consider how people can derive license from one-time political events.

People look to political events to understand what their society considers socially acceptable (Tankard & Paluck, 2017). For example, Americans may have looked to the 2016 U.S. presidential election for insight into the social acceptability of expressing prejudice. Donald Trump had beaten Hillary Clinton at the polls after he waged a campaign accused of expressing prejudice towards women, Mexicans, Muslims, disabled people, and other groups. In one study, prejudice against groups targeted by Trump seemed more socially acceptable to American participants when they were surveyed after the election than when they were surveyed before the election (Crandall et al., 2018); no such effect was found when participants considered prejudice against groups that Trump had not targeted (e.g., atheists, Canadians). To the extent that people feel licensed to express their own prejudices when they perceive such prejudice to be socially acceptable, these findings raise the possibility that a one-time political event like an election could create inconsistencies in the expression of prejudice across time (Crandall et al., 2002; Kievit et al., in press). People who felt obligated to keep their prejudices to themselves before such an event might feel emboldened to express their prejudices after such an event.

Some evidence for this possibility comes from a study we ran about how expressions of gender bias might change following the 2016 U.S. presidential election (Georgeac et al., 2019). We surveyed over 2,000 participants – half just before the election, and half just after the

election – who supported either Clinton or Trump. To assess people’s willingness to express gender-biased attitudes, we administered the Modern Sexism Scale (Swim et al., 1995), as well as several expected correlates of gender bias. At the time we planned the study, Hillary Clinton was ahead in the polls, so we pre-registered hypotheses about how a Clinton win could affect gender attitudes. We did not have hypotheses about the effects of a Trump win so we considered our analyses exploratory. Thus, although several statistical robustness checks reduced concerns that these findings are false positives, any conclusions should be considered tentative.

We discovered that Trump supporters (but not Clinton supporters) expressed greater modern sexism after the election compared to before the election. These higher modern sexism scores were in turn associated with feeling less disturbed with the gender pay gap, perceiving less gender discrimination against women (but more gender discrimination against men), and believing that the U.S. had made more progress towards gender equality.

There are several explanations for these findings, but one is that Trump’s election signaled to his supporters that it was socially acceptable to express gender bias or other politically incorrect views (as observed by Crandall et al., 2018). In this view, Trump supporters under-reported their modern-sexist views before the election – but after the election, they felt licensed to say what they really thought (see also Newman et al., 2021). Perhaps his election did not have the same effect on Clinton supporters because they were less likely to interpret Trump’s election as a license, or because they were less likely to have modern-sexist views to suppress before the election began. These speculative explanations fit with the broader idea that one-time political events may license large groups of people by signaling that it is acceptable to express certain views.

2.1.2.4 Summary: Other people as a source of license

The findings reviewed in this section reveal how moral inconsistency can arise from our ability to use other people as a license to do or say what we want. Looking to your behavioral history for evidence of your moral character is not the only way to feel licensed. People may feel licensed to lie when someone advises them to do so, licensed to express their racial biases when they hold membership in an entitative group, and licensed to express sexism when sociopolitical events signal a shift in the social acceptability of these views. The result is a pattern of moral inconsistency. Without a psychological license, people feel more obligated to uphold norms of honesty and equality. With a psychological license, they may feel liberated to lie and express prejudice.

2.2 Beyond license: Temptation as a source of moral inconsistency

A simple model underlies the examples of moral inconsistency we have discussed so far: People feel both tempted to take and inhibited from taking morally questionable actions (see also Lewin, 1947; Mazar et al., 2008; Miller & Effron, 2010; Schier et al., 2016). Sources of psychological license reduce the inhibition, freeing people to give into the temptation. In this view, people's moral behavior is inconsistent across time and situations because different times and situations afford different degrees of license. However, the same model also suggests a complementary reason for moral inconsistency. The temptation to do something morally questionable varies across time and situations, even if the inhibition against doing it remains the same. By analogy, lapses in a diet are not only a function of license (e.g., eating brownies to celebrate an academic accomplishment; Prinsen et al., 2019; Wilcox et al., 2011) but also of temptation (e.g., eating brownies when one is particularly hungry; Yam et al., 2014). In this section, we discuss how predictable differences in temptation across time can lead to moral inconsistency.

Consider a worker faced with a series of opportunities to overbill clients without getting caught. At first, though she might be tempted by the chance to make more money without additional work, concerns about feeling guilty might inhibit her from overbilling. When she reaches the final overbilling opportunity, however, her temptation to make money may intensify without a commensurate change in her inhibition. The reason is that the opportunity for “easy money” is, by definition, scarcest at the end of the series – and scarcity increases attraction (Brock & Brannon, 1992; Cialdini, 1988; Lynn, 1992; Worchel et al., 1975). As a result, faced with a series of opportunities to get away with cheating, people are more likely to cheat at the end.

We tested this *cheat-at-the-end effect* in a series of experiments. In one experiment (Effron, Bryan, et al., 2015, Study 4), we hired hundreds of ad hoc research assistants (RAs) over the internet to code a series of essays written by participants in previous study. We explained to the RAs that we would pay them £0.10 per minute, and that after reading and coding each essay, they should report how long they took. Unbeknownst to the RAs, we surreptitiously measured how long they actually spent coding each essay, so we could detect how much, if at all, they overbilled us. The RAs knew in advance how many essays they would code, and we randomized whether this number was 7 or 10. The results showed that the RAs overbilled us more on whichever essay they coded last. Specifically, they overbilled more on the seventh essay when they expected seven essays total than when they expected ten; RAs who expected seven essays were more likely to overbill on the seventh essay than on earlier ones; and RAs who expected ten essays were more likely to overbill on the tenth essay than on earlier ones.

A different study shed light on mechanism (Effron, Bryan, et al., 2015, Study 3). Participants (correctly) anticipated that they would be more likely to lie about the results of a

coin flip for money when it was the last flip in a series compared to an earlier flip. Suggesting that an increase in temptation, rather than an increase in license, explains this finding, people anticipated that they would experience more *regret* if they passed up the final (vs. an earlier) opportunity to cheat, but did not anticipate that they would experience less *guilt* if they took the final (vs. an earlier) opportunity. Whereas psychological license should reduce guilt about cheating, increased temptation should magnify regret about missing out.

As the cheat-at-the-end effect demonstrates, people's ability to grant themselves psychological license is not the only reason their behavior can be morally inconsistent. Increases in temptation at predictable time points, such as the "last chance" to seize an opportunity for personal gain, can also foster such inconsistency.

3. Inconsistency among our moral judgments of others' behavior

We now turn from inconsistency in moral behaviors to inconsistency in moral judgments of *others'* behaviors. Why do people sometimes condemn others for a morally questionable behavior, and sometimes let them off the hook? Our research has examined three factors that promote this type of moral inconsistency: motivation, imagination, and repetition (see Effron & Helgason, 2022).

3.1 Motivation as a source of moral inconsistency

One source of inconsistency in our moral judgments is our motivation to let some people, but not others, off the hook for wrongdoing. One situation in which we feel motivated to excuse transgressions is when they are performed by someone whom we like, and one person we tend to like is ourselves (e.g., Leary, 1999; Pyszczynski et al., 2004; Sedikides et al., 2003; Sedikides & Strube, 1997). Accordingly, people will judge the same transgression as fairer and more acceptable if the transgressor is them than if it is someone else (Lammers, 2012; Lammers et al.,

2010; Valdesolo & DeSteno, 2007, 2008). This motivation to excuse wrongdoing extends to others beyond oneself to one's ingroup. People judge self-serving actions as more acceptable when performed by their ingroup than an outgroup (Valdesolo & DeSteno, 2007), they are more willing to forgive ingroup leaders than outgroup leaders for the same wrongdoing (Abrams et al., 2013), and they judge torture and other transgressions as more moral when performed by members of their own (vs. another) nation (Tarrant et al., 2012). The moral inconsistency that people display in these cases is that they are more likely to give someone a pass to transgress if they like that person.

Another situation in which people may feel motivated to condone a transgression is when that transgression advances their interests. For instance, observers judge actors who cheated on an experimental task as more moral when observers themselves benefitted from the cheating (Bocian & Wojciszke, 2014). People judge norm-violations as more acceptable when those norm-violations advance a cause (e.g., abortion rights) that they agree with (Mueller & Skitka, 2018). Similarly, the more people support a country's decision to go to war, the more acceptable they judge that country's war crimes such as torture and the killing of civilians (Watkins & Goodwin, 2020). People may even respond to transgressions with admiration when they are performed in the service of one's group (Tang et al., 2022).

Partisan motivations may similarly lead to inconsistency in moral judgments of others' dishonesty. In several studies, we recruited American partisans to judge a series of political falsehoods. Participants correctly identified these claims as false, yet they rated falsehoods that fit with their politics as less unethical to tell (Effron, 2018; Helgason & Effron, in press). For example, Democrats (who tend to support increasing gun control) thought it was less unethical than Republicans to make the false claim that "25% of legal gun purchases are made without

background checks,” whereas Republicans (who tend to think the Biden administration is too soft on immigration) thought it was less unethical than Democrats to make the false claim that “Joe Biden has halted all deportations.”

What explains these partisan differences? We suggest that even when people know that a lie is literally false, they are more likely to believe that the lie’s *gist*, or general idea, is true if it aligns with their politics – and the truer people think the gist is, the more inclined they will be to excuse (though not believe the details of) the lie (Helgason & Effron, in press; Langdon & Effron, under review). For example, among Democrats and Republicans who know that *fewer than 25%* of legal gun purchases are made without background checks (Miller et al., 2017), Democrats may be more likely to excuse this falsehood because they are more likely to believe the gist that “It’s too easy to purchase guns without a background check.”

Partisan motivations may influence the way people think about a falsehood’s gist in at least two ways. First, the motivation to excuse someone for telling a falsehood may increase people’s belief in the falsehood’s gist. In one study (Helgason et al., in progress), British partisans read a series of falsehoods about bipartisan issues (e.g., gas prices). We clearly identified each falsehood as false, and attributed it either to a (fictional) Member of Parliament (MP) from participants’ own political party or from the opposing party. For example, for half of participants, the falsehood that “The cost of gas has risen continuously over the past 3 years” was attributed to a Labour MP and for the other half of participants it was attributed to a Conservative MP. Results showed that when the falsehood was ostensibly told by an MP from participants’ own party (compared to the opposing party), participants judged the falsehood’s gist as truer – and the truer they found the gist, the less unethical they thought the falsehood was to tell. Because we showed all participants the same falsehoods, manipulating only the identity of

the MPs who told them, the results cannot be explained by partisan differences in prior knowledge of the falsehoods. Instead, it seems likely that the motivation to excuse a member of one's own party inflated people's belief in the falsehood's gist.

Second, the motivation to excuse a falsehood may increase the weight people give to its gist when judging its morality. For instance, if a politician you oppose falsely claims that 25% of legal gun purchases are made without background checks, you may condemn the politician regardless of whether you believe the gist that purchasing guns without a background check is too easy—a lie is still a lie. However, if a politician you *support* makes the same false claim, you may be more inclined to excuse it if you believe the gist than if you do not. More broadly, a “true gist” may seem like a better justification for excusing a falsehood when we like the person who told it. This idea remains to be tested, but fits with other findings on the motivated use evidence to defend leaders we support from condemnation (Helgason & Effron, 2022).

In short, people are more likely to condone a falsehood if it fits with their politics, and to tolerate wrongdoing if it is committed by themselves or an ingroup member. Motivated reasoning may account for these patterns of moral inconsistency, with the caveat that motivated and cognitive explanations are difficult to disentangle (Tetlock & Levi, 1982), especially in the context of partisan differences (Druckman & McGrath, 2019; Kahan, 2016; Little, 2022; Tappin et al., 2020a, 2020b). For example, Democrats and Republicans are motivated to excuse different falsehoods, but they are also exposed to different information through media and social networks. Nonetheless, wrongdoing may seem less wrong when you like the person who committed it or the cause it advances.

3.2 Imagination as a source of moral inconsistency

Earlier we discussed how motivation can lead to inconsistency in moral judgment. Many of these studies identified political partisanship as a key source of motivation to condemn or condone transgressions. In the next section, we discuss how imagination amplifies moral inconsistency, both by directly affecting moral judgment and by heightening the effects of partisanship on moral judgment.

The human capacity for imagination allows us to mentally simulate possible pasts and futures. For example, we can imagine what life *would have been* like if we had moved in with a former romantic partner, or what life *could be* like if we move in with our current partner. This capacity is highly adaptive; it helps us learn from mistakes, plan for the future, and assess causality (e.g., Byrne, 2017; Epstude & Roese, 2008; Epstude et al., 2016). However, in the domain of moral judgments, our capacity for imagination also has a dark side. We have already reviewed research on how people license themselves to sin by imagining transgressions they *could have* performed, but declined to perform (Effron et al., 2012; Effron et al., 2013), or virtues they *plan to perform*, but have not yet performed (Cascio & Plant, 2015). Whereas that research was concerned with moral inconsistency in behaviors, we now consider how imagination facilitates moral inconsistency in judgments. Specifically, we examine how imagining what might have been (i.e., *counterfactual thinking*) or what might occur (i.e., *prefactual thinking*) can increase inconsistency in moral judgments of dishonesty, blame, and hypocrisy.

3.2.1 Imagination and moral judgments of dishonesty

Elizabeth Holmes, the now-disgraced former CEO of Theranos, lied to investors and consumers about her company's patented medical-testing device, falsely claiming it could diagnose hundreds of diseases using a single drop of blood. At the same time, Holmes seemed

certain that the device would eventually do what she said it already did. Describing her attitude towards entrepreneurship, she said, “We will fail over a thousand times till we get this thing to work, but we will get it on the 1,001st time” (Parloff, 2014). Did her ability to imagine that the device would work in the future help her and others justify lying about the device’s *current* capabilities? Our research suggests that a lie can seem less unethical when people imagine how it *might become true* in the future (Helgason & Effron, in press). In this way, prefactual thinking may foster moral inconsistency in judgments. People should be more inclined to excuse the same falsehood when it is easy to imagine it coming true at some point.

In one study, we asked several hundred MBA students how unethical it would be for a friend to lie on his resume about knowing financial modelling (Helgason & Effron, in press). We randomly assigned half of these students to imagine whether their friend *might* learn financial modelling in the future if, for example, he took a course on the subject. The other half of students did not imagine such a prefactual. Results showed that students who imagined whether their friend might learn financial modelling in the future thought it was not so bad for him to lie about having this skill in the present. Even though the futures people imagine often do not come to pass (Buehler et al., 2010; Buehler et al., 1994), students did not need assurance that their friend would indeed learn financial modelling in the future. Simply inviting them to imagine whether—or not—their friend might develop this skill was enough to make the lie seem more excusable. The moral inconsistency here is that the same lie seems less unethical when one imagines a particular future.

Prefactual thinking is not the only type of imagination that facilitates moral inconsistency in judgments. When the Trump administration falsely claimed his inauguration was the biggest in history, Trump’s counselor Kellyanne Conway defended the claim by suggesting that rain

“deterred many people from coming,” essentially inviting people to imagine that Trump’s inauguration *could have* been bigger if the weather had been nicer (Rossoll, 2017). Our research suggests that this tactic may not convince people that a falsehood is true, but it can reduce how harshly they condemn a falsehood (Effron, 2018). In three studies, participants on both sides of the political aisle judged false political claims as less unethical when prompted to imagine how the falsehoods could have been true if circumstances had been different. In this way, counterfactual thinking facilitates inconsistency in moral judgments: The same wrongdoing seems less unethical when particular alternatives to the past are top of mind. This phenomenon may contribute to inconsistency in moral behavior: People are more likely to lie in situations that make it easy to imagine how their lie could have been true (Bassarak et al., 2017; Briazu et al., 2017; Shalvi et al., 2011).

Why will people judge the same falsehood as less unethical when they imagine it could have been, or might become, true? We have argued that beliefs about the falsehood’s gist – the same factor that can make a falsehood seem less unethical when it fits with our politics (Helgason et al., in progress) – affect moral judgments through the following process (Helgason & Effron, in press). First, imagining a prefactual or counterfactual scenario may bring to mind information that is consistent with that scenario (Klayman & Ha, 1987; Koehler, 1991; Snyder & Swann, 1978; Trope & Liberman, 1996). For example, suppose someone knows that fewer than 25% of legal gun purchases are made without background checks, but imagines the prefactual, “If the NRA [National Rifle Association] continues to lobby Congress, then 25% of legal gun purchases will be made without background checks.” Imagining this prefactual may prompt this person to remember how high-profile politicians spoke at a recent NRA event, to recall reading

something about a mass shooter who purchased a gun without a background check, and to consider other information suggesting that the prefactual scenario is plausible.

Next, this information should make the gist of the relevant falsehood seem truer, without increasing people's belief in the falsehood itself. For instance, thinking about the NRA event and the mass shooter could make the person think: *Even if it's not literally true that 25% of legal gun purchases are made without background checks, the general point remains that it's too easy to purchase guns without a background check.* Finally, this increased belief in the gist of the falsehood should make the falsehood seem less unethical to tell. Falsely claiming that "25% of legal gun purchases are made without background checks" may not seem so bad if you believe that it is too easy to purchase guns without a background check. Our results are consistent with this process: Imagining how a falsehood might become true made the gist of a falsehood seem truer – and the truer the gist of the falsehood seemed, the less unethical participants thought it was to tell (Helgason & Effron, in press).

So far, we have seen how moral judgments of dishonesty may be inconsistent because different possible pasts (counterfactuals) and futures (prefactuals) are salient in different situations. Imagination may also increase a different kind of moral inconsistency: The tendency to judge falsehoods more leniently when they support your partisan views than when they do not. The reason is that a falsehood will seem less unethical when people imagine scenarios in which it could have been true or might become true – and people are more willing and able to imagine such scenarios when the falsehood fits with their politics (Epstude et al., in press; Tetlock, 1998; Tetlock & Henik, 2005; Tetlock & Visser, 2000).

To test this idea, we recruited American political partisans to judge falsehoods about inequality, illegal voting, police violence, and other controversial issues. Half of the falsehoods

fit with Democrats' political beliefs (e.g., "White Americans are 300% more likely to be approved for mortgages than Black or Hispanic Americans with the same credentials") and half fit with Republicans' political beliefs (e.g., "Millions of people voted illegally in the 2016 presidential election"). We then randomly assigned half of participants to imagine whether the claims could have been true (Effron, 2018) or might become true (Helgason & Effron, in press). The other half of participants were randomly assigned to a control condition in which they either did not imagine anything, or they imagined how an unrelated event could have been true or might become true, depending on the study. The results showed that irrespective of whether the falsehood fit with participants' beliefs, imagining how it could have been true, or might become true, reduced their condemnation of the falsehood. However, this effect was larger when the falsehood fit with participants' politics. Thus, imagining how a falsehood could have been or might become true magnified partisan differences in how harshly people condemned falsehoods (see Figures 2 and 3). Additional results suggested that this was because participants had an easier time imagining counterfactuals and prefactuals that fit with their politics. In this way, imagination increased partisans' morally inconsistent tendency to condemn falsehoods that fit with their politics less than falsehoods that do not.

3.2.2 Imagination and moral judgments of blame

We have now presented several examples of how imagined scenarios can promote moral inconsistency. For example, people are more likely to express prejudice when they can easily imagine racist behaviors they never performed (Effron et al., 2012), and more likely to excuse dishonesty when they can easily imagine how a lie could have been – or might become – true (Effron, 2018; Helgason & Effron, in press). However, moral inconsistency can emerge not only

from the specific scenarios imagine, but also from the *conclusions* people draw from those scenarios (Epstude et al., in press).

Consider the fact that the U.S. and North Korea never went to war during Donald Trump's presidency – but that some observers worried they might. In the summer of 2017, Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong-un exchanged bellicose messages which – it is possible to imagine – could have escalated into a firing war (see Baker & Sang-Hun, 2017). How much blame does Trump deserve for “almost” starting a war? Classic research suggests that the answer will depend on how close you think Trump came to provoking war; in general, the closer someone came to causing or allowing a negative event, the more blame they receive (Johnson, 1986; Miller & McFarland, 1986). But exactly how much does the imagined closeness of an event influence blame judgments? We predicted that partisanship would play a role. Trump opponents might be motivated to blame Trump for any negative event – even one that never occurred. Thus, his opponents might be more likely than his supporters to view the imagined closeness of war as a compelling reason to blame him. More generally, the closer people imagine a negative event came to occurring, the more they should blame a leader for “almost” allowing it to occur – but particularly among people who dislike the leader.

To test this prediction, we (Epstude et al., in press) showed participants eight descriptions of counterfactual political events, half of which could plausibly have occurred during the Trump administration (e.g., war with North Korea in the summer of 2017) and half of which could plausibly have occurred during the Biden administration (e.g., renewed war with the Taliban in the summer of 2021). Participants had to rate how close they thought each counterfactual event came to occurring, and how much they blamed the relevant president for “nearly” allowing its occurrence. The results showed that, consistent with prior work (Johnson, 1986; Miller &

McFarland, 1986), the closer people thought the negative event came to occurring, the more they blamed the relevant president for “nearly” allowing it. Going beyond prior work, the magnitude of this effect was larger when participants opposed (vs. supported) the relevant president (see Figure 4). Thus, participants not only blamed the president they opposed more than the president they supported – a straightforward effect of partisanship – they also gave more weight to the imagined closeness of a negative counterfactual event when they were assigning blame to a president they opposed versus supported. It is morally inconsistent to use different standards of evidence when assigning blame to different individuals. Here, partisans used a weaker standard of evidence – how “close” they imagined a negative event came to occurring – when assigning blame to leaders they oppose than to leaders they support.

3.2.3 Imagination and moral judgments of hypocrisy

In the study just reviewed, people applied moral standards inconsistently, drawing on counterfactual thoughts to blame a leader they support more than a leader they oppose. Counterfactual thinking may also lead people to accuse *others* of applying moral standards inconsistently. Consider how commentator Jesse Watters defended President Trump for his response to COVID-19: “What would the media say if Barack Obama were president during the Coronavirus Pandemic and handled it the same way as @realDonaldTrump?” Watters elaborated on his cable news show: “It goes something like this: ‘Barack Obama putting politics aside and sacrificing’” (Watters, 2020). Watters is inviting us to imagine a counterfactual world in which the media showed a politically motivated double standard by praising Obama for the exact same behavior they condemned in Trump. In other words, he is accusing the media of *counterfactual hypocrisy*. Of course, Barack Obama was not president during the pandemic, so it is impossible to know for sure if his handling of the pandemic would have compared to Trump’s, or how the

media would have reacted. Nonetheless, our research suggests that this type of counterfactual thinking can indeed make critics of the leaders you support seem hypocritical (Helgason & Effron, 2022).

In one study (Helgason & Effron, 2022, Study 2b), we showed Obama supporters and Trump supporters criticisms that media commentators had made of various actions by Barack Obama (e.g., attending a baseball game shortly after learning of terrorist bombings) and Donald Trump (e.g., playing golf during the funerals of victims of a high school shooting). Thus, half of the criticisms targeted a president whom participants supported, and the other half targeted a president whom they opposed. By random assignment, we prompted half the participants to imagine how harshly the media commentator *would have* criticized the other president for the same action. For example: “Suppose that Barack Obama [rather than Trump] had been the one to play golf during the funerals of victims of a high school shooting – how harshly would [the commentator] have criticized Obama for this action?” This condition affords participants an opportunity to imagine the commentator displaying a politically motivated double standard. The other half of participants were prompted to imagine how harshly the media commentator would have criticized the same president’s vice president for the same action. For example: “Suppose that Mike Pence [rather than Trump] had been the one to play golf during the funerals of victims of a high school shooting – how harshly would [the commentator] have criticized Pence for this action?” This condition prompts counterfactual thinking, but affords little opportunity to imagine a politically motivated double standard. Finally, for the dependent measure, all participants rated how hypocritical they found the original criticism (e.g., of Trump for playing golf).

The results showed that, when participants considered a criticism of the president they supported, prompting them to imagine how harshly the media commentator would have

criticized the *other* president for the same behavior made them judge the critic as more hypocritical. Thus, participants condemned media commentators for politically motivated double standards that the commentators had not literally displayed – but that participants imagined they *would have* displayed if given the chance.

This *counterfactual hypocrisy effect* emerged among Obama and Trump supporters, but did *not* emerge when people considered media criticism of a politician they opposed (see Figure 5). Additional results suggested two reasons why. First, only when considering a criticism of a president they supported did participants imagine that the critic would have shown a politically motivated double-standard. For example, when considering a media commentator’s criticism of Obama for attending a baseball game after terrorist bombings, Obama supporters (and not Trump supporters) imagined that the commentator would have criticized Trump less harshly if he had been the one to attend a game after such bombings. Likewise, when considering the commentator’s criticism of Trump for playing golf during the funeral of victims of a high school shooting, Trump supporters (and not Obama supporters) imagined that the commentator would have criticized Obama less harshly if *Obama* had been the one to play golf during the funeral. In this way, partisanship predicted the specific counterfactual scenarios that people imagined.

Second, partisanship also predicted the *conclusions* that people drew from the counterfactual scenario they imagined. When participants considered a criticism of the president they supported, the harsher they imagined the critic would have criticized the other president for the same action, the more hypocrisy they attributed to the critic. In contrast, when participants considered a criticism of the president they opposed, attributions of hypocrisy did not depend on the harshness of the imagined criticism (see Figure 6). For example, when Obama supporters (but not Trump supporters) considered the media’s criticism of Obama’s baseball game

attendance, the harsher they imagined the media would have criticized Trump for the same behavior, the more hypocritical they found the media. Similarly, when Trump supporters (but not Obama supporters) considered the media's criticism of Trump's golfing, the harsher they imagined the media would have criticized Obama for the same behavior, the more hypocritical they found the media critic. When the media criticizes someone we oppose, we may require actual evidence of motivated inconsistency to perceive hypocrisy. When the media criticizes someone we support, imagined evidence may suffice.

These results show how imagination can facilitate moral inconsistency in judgments of hypocrisy in two ways. First, people may not judge someone as particularly hypocritical until they imagine what that person *would have* done if circumstances had been different. Second, imagination increases partisan differences in judgments of hypocrisy. The same criticism may seem more hypocritical if it targets a political leader you support than if it targets one you oppose – and imagination can amplify this inconsistency (see Figure 5).

3.2.4 Summary: Imagination as a source of moral inconsistency

In this section, we have shown how mentally simulating what could have been or what might come to pass facilitates inconsistencies in moral judgements of others' behavior. People will condemn the same falsehood less harshly when they imagine how it could have been true or might become true (Effron, 2018; Helgason & Effron, in press); they will weigh imagined, negative events more heavily when assigning blame to someone they dislike compared to someone they like (Epstude et al., in press); and they will be more likely to condemn a critic they dislike as hypocritical if they imagine that the critic *would have* shown double standards if given the chance (Helgason & Effron, 2022). Why? Imagination provides moral flexibility in at least two ways. First, people may imagine alternatives to reality—counterfactuals and prefactuals—

that support their desired conclusions. Second, people place greatest weight on imagined events that help them reach these desired conclusions.

The findings reviewed in this section also shed light on moral inconsistencies that fall along partisan lines. Partisans may form very different moral judgments about the same event even when they agree on the facts – in part because they do not agree on the prefactuals or the counterfactuals. Partisans may disagree about whether a falsehood *could have been* true or *might become* true, whether a president should be blamed for *almost* starting a war, and whether the media *would have* criticized opposing politicians differently for the same behavior. Imagination may be particularly conducive to partisan conflict because unlike claims about facts, claims about what could have occurred in the past or might occur at some unspecified point in the future cannot be falsified.

3.3 Repetition as a source of moral inconsistency

In addition to motivation and imagination, a third reason for inconsistency in people's moral judgments of others' behavior is repetition. All else equal, repeated exposure to the same moral violation can make it seem less unethical to commit (Efron, in press; Efron & Raj, 2020). As a result, people's moral judgments of a wrongdoing may become less severe as they become more familiar with it – a pattern of moral inconsistency across time. This *moral repetition effect* occurs even when the repetitions have been spaced out over a period of two weeks (Pillai et al., in preparation).

The first experimental evidence for the moral repetition effect came from a series of studies on moral judgments of fake news (Efron & Raj, 2020). Previous research showed that misinformation seemed truer when repeatedly encountered (e.g., Dechêne et al., 2010; Pennycook et al., 2018; Pillai & Fazio, 2021). We wondered whether misinformation that people

knew was false would seem less unethical to spread when repeatedly encountered. Participants in our studies rated how unethical it would be to publish or share each of several fake-news headlines on social media. The studies clearly identified these headlines to participants as false. Half of the headlines had been shown to participants earlier in the study, and the other half had not. Consistent with the moral repetition effect, participants rated the headlines they had previously seen as less unethical to publish and share than the headlines they were seeing for the first time.

What explains this moral-repetition effect? At the time, we drew on a distinction in cognitive psychology (e.g., Newman et al., 2012; Shidlovski et al., 2014) between what people explicitly believe (“in their head”) and what they intuitively feel is true (“in their gut”). We speculated that repetition might make fake news feel intuitively truthful even when people do not explicitly believe it – and that the more intuitively truthful a piece of fake news feels, the less unethical it seems to spread.

However, follow-up work failed to support a key prediction of this mechanism. If repetition affects moral judgments by making misinformation feel intuitively truthful, then repetition should affect moral judgments of misinformation more than moral judgments of wrongdoing that is unrelated to misinformation. Yet the moral-repetition effect replicates with a similar effect size even when people judge moral transgressions that are unrelated to misinformation (Effron, in press): from corporate transgressions (e.g., a cosmetics company harming a test monkey), to more ordinary misdeeds (e.g., leaving the scene of a car accident), to violations of six “moral foundations” (e.g., having sex with a frozen chicken; see Graham et al., 2013).

Instead, an affective mechanism seems to explain the moral repetition effect. A foundational principle in contemporary moral psychology is that affect, more than reasoning, drives moral judgment (Greene & Haidt, 2002; Haidt & Kesebir, 2010). When we first hear about a wrongdoing, we may experience a “flash of negative affect” (Haidt, 2001, p. 998). The more intense that affective flash is, the more negative our moral judgments will be. However, when we subsequently encounter the same wrongdoing, we may experience less-intense negative affect, for two reasons. First, people habituate to negative stimuli after repeated exposure (e.g., Campbell et al., 2014; Dijksterhuis & Smith, 2002; Hoffman & Kaire, 2020; Leventhal et al., 2007). Second, people may spontaneously “explain away” the wrongdoings, reducing their potency by generating reasons why they are not so bad (Wilson & Gilbert, 2008). In either case, the less-intense affective reaction would dampen people’s moral condemnation of the wrongdoing.

Two findings provide direct evidence for this affective mechanism. First, people rate their affective reactions to a wrongdoing as weaker when they have previously encountered that wrongdoing earlier in the study, and affective reactions mediate the relationship between repetition and moral judgment (Effron, in press; Pillai et al., in preparation). Second, instructing people to form their moral judgments based on reason instead of emotion eliminates the moral-repetition effect (Effron, in press). Thus, it appears that affective desensitization can explain this effect.

In short, our moral outrage about transgressions ebbs over time as we hear more and more about them. In this way, as other moral psychologists have observed (Avramova & Inbar, 2013; Bloom, 2017; Greene et al., 2008; Slovic, 2007; Small et al., 2007; Strohminger et al.,

2011), our reliance on affect to form moral judgments makes these judgments susceptible to moral inconsistency.

4. Tolerating others' moral inconsistency

In the first two parts of this chapter, we discussed why people's own moral behavior can be inconsistent, and why their moral judgments of others' behavior can be inconsistent. We now consider why people sometimes condone others' moral inconsistency. Our focus is on how people react to others' "word-deed misalignment" (Simons, 2002) in the moral domain – inconsistencies between the virtues they preach and the vices they practice. One reason for our focus is that word-deed misalignment is the type of moral inconsistency that has received the most attention in research on person perception (for a review, see Effron, O'Connor, et al., 2018). Another reason is that an actor's word-deed misalignment in the moral domain can have very negative social consequences for the actor (e.g., Kreps et al., 2017). A third reason is that people are frequently confronted with word-deed misalignment in the real world – at work when a manager "says one thing but does another" (e.g., Simons et al., 2007), at home when a parent tells you to "do as I say, not as I've done" (Efron & Miller, 2015), or in the news when leaders violate the very policies they implement (Leslie, 2020).

People often respond negatively to others' word-deed misalignment. The same wrongdoing receives harsher condemnation, may be punished more severely, and can cause more lasting reputational damage when the wrongdoer has previously preached against it (Bhatti et al., 2013; Effron, Markus, et al., 2018; Grover & Hasel, 2015; Laurent et al., 2013; Powell & Smith, 2012). Managers who chronically "say one thing but do another" are regarded with less trust and inspire less motivation than managers who "walk their talk" (Simons, 2002; Simons et al., 2014). People appear to be so averse to word-deed misalignment that they will penalize an employee for

failing to practice a value that his or her *organization* preached, even if the employee never endorsed the value him or herself (Effron, Lucas, et al., 2015). Together, these findings support an intuitive inclusion: People hate hypocrisy (Gilbert & Jones, 1986).

However, recent research demonstrates that people do not always respond negatively to others' word-deed misalignment. People may hate hypocrisy, but not all word-deed misalignment "counts" as hypocrisy in people's minds (Alicke et al., 2013; Effron, O'Connor, et al., 2018; Jordan et al., 2017). In this section, we highlight situations in which people are more tolerant of others' inconsistency; then, we review two theories explaining why.

4.1 When inconsistency is not so hypocritical

Reviewing the literature on hypocrisy, Effron, O'Connor, and colleagues (2018) identified several factors that reduce the apparent hypocrisy of word-deed misalignment, four of which we highlight here.

4.1.1 Order of practicing and preaching

People think it is more hypocritical for someone to preach safe sex, and subsequently have unprotected sex, than they think it is for someone to have unprotected sex, and subsequently preach safe sex (Barden et al., 2005). More generally, failing to practice what you preach seems more hypocritical than preaching against what you used to practice (see also Wagner et al., 2009). The degree of inconsistency is identical in both cases, but when the preaching follows the practicing, people assume the preacher has had a change of heart – in their view, the preaching represents a sincere attempt to promote others' virtue rather than a hypocritical attempt to disguise one's own vice. This effect is particularly pronounced when people judge the inconsistency of an ingroup member as opposed to an outgroup member (Barden et al., 2014). Because people are inclined to give ingroup members the benefit of the

doubt, preaching against what you used to practice is more likely to be interpreted as evidence that an ingroup member (vs. outgroup member) “turned over a new leaf.”

4.1.2 Suffering for misdeeds

Consider a professor who had an affair with one of his undergraduate students 40 years ago, but now advises his junior colleagues to avoid romantic relationships with students. Such moral inconsistency tends to seem hypocritical (though less so than if the professor had begun the affair *after* offering the advice; Barden et al., 2005). However, if the affair had left the professor fired, divorced, and ostracized by his peers and students, then his subsequent preaching might seem less hypocritical. More generally, suffering for your misdeeds in the past may reduce how hypocritical it seems to preach against them in the present.

Several studies provide support for this idea (Effron & Miller, 2015). People thought that actors were more entitled to preach against their former misdeeds – from sexual indiscretions, to smoking, to fraud – if they had suffered for their misdeeds. Mediation analysis suggested that this effect could be explained by suffering making the preaching seem less hypocritical and self-righteous.

4.1.3. Ambiguity of wrongdoing

A White manager who has a history of endorsing racial equality would be a hypocrite if he promoted five White employees over two Black employees while claiming that Black people are unsuitable for management. However, consider if he instead claimed that in this particular case, the five White employees were simply more qualified. Absent other information, his promotion decision is now ambiguous; the racial imbalance could reflect racial prejudice, or it could be a coincidence. Evidence suggests that, unsurprisingly, blatantly transgressing a particular value (e.g., racial equality) seems more hypocritical if you have previously endorsed

that value than if you have not – but *ambiguously* transgressing a value (e.g., making a decision that might or might not represent racial discrimination) elicits *more positive* reactions from observers if you have previously endorsed that value than if you have not (Efron & Monin, 2010). The reason is that endorsing a value grants people moral credentials, which in turn can make ambiguous (but not blatant) transgressions seem less wrong (see also Krumm & Corning, 2008; Polman et al., 2013; Thai et al., 2016). Observers think that the manager’s ambiguous decision not to promote the Black employees is less likely to have been motivated by racism when he has a history of endorsing racial equality.

4.1.4. Culture

People in interdependent cultural contexts (e.g., Japan and Indonesia), compared to those in independent cultural contexts (e.g., the U.S.), express less moral condemnation of individuals who fail to practice what they preach (Dong et al., 2022; Efron, Markus, et al., 2018; see also Friedman et al., 2018). What underlies these cultural differences? The data suggest that culture influences how people interpret others’ preaching (Dong et al., 2022; Efron, Markus, et al., 2018). In independent cultural contexts, people tend to impute selfish motives for preaching against a vice one practices. Through the lens of independent contexts, this moral inconsistency presumably seems hypocritical, reflecting an attempt to appear more virtuous than one actually is. By contrast, in interdependent cultural contexts, people tend to impute more other-oriented motives for preaching against a vice that one practices. Through the lens of interdependent contexts, the same moral inconsistency presumably seems less hypocritical; preaching seems like a genuine attempt to help others be more virtuous despite being unable to always act virtuously oneself.

4.2 When does inconsistency count as hypocrisy?

The hypocrisy findings reviewed thus far challenge early approaches to hypocrisy in social psychology and organizational behavior, which simply equated hypocrisy with inconsistency (Greenbaum et al., 2015; Simons, 2002; Tedeschi et al., 1971). Other scholars have argued that this view of hypocrisy is problematic from a normative perspective; not all inconsistencies *should* count as hypocrisy (Monin & Merritt, 2012; Szabados & Soifer, 2004). The findings we reviewed show that it is also problematic from a descriptive perspective. That is, in the minds of laypeople, not all inconsistencies *do* count as hypocrisy (see also Alicke et al., 2013; Laurent & Clark, 2019).

Instead, whether people condemn inconsistency seems to depend on how they interpret it. In this sense, hypocrisy appears to be a morally discrediting interpretation of inconsistency (Cha & Edmondson, 2006; Effron, Markus, et al., 2018) – one that people are more inclined to make in some situations and cultures than in others. Two recent theories of hypocrisy judgments agree on this point, but disagree on the nature of this interpretation. We describe each theory in turn.

4.2.1 The false-signaling theory

One theory posits that inconsistency is only hypocritical if it involves falsely signaling to others that one's future behavior will be virtuous (Jordan et al., 2017). In this view, someone who preaches against a particular vice implicitly communicates that they will not personally commit that vice; when they do commit the vice, they reveal that their communication was deceptive. Thus, a swimmer who uses performance-enhancing drugs will be evaluated more negatively if he previously criticized others for using such drugs than if he did not, because his criticism falsely signaled to others that he would not use such drugs himself.

The false-signaling perspective can explain why word-deed misalignment seems less hypocritical when the deeds precede the words, when the actor has suffered for deeds, when the

deeds are only ambiguously bad, or when the observer is in an interdependent cultural context (Effron, O'Connor, et al., 2018). It is plausible that each of these situations makes the words seem less like a false signal about future behavior. For example, in interdependent (vs. independent) cultural contexts, people may be less likely to interpret preaching against a behavior as a signal about one's future behavior (Friedman et al., 2018). Preaching against your own misdeeds may seem less like a false signal of virtue when you have suffered for the misdeeds, perhaps because suffering suggests you have genuinely forsworn the misdeeds (Effron & Miller, 2015).

In direct support of the false-signaling theory, Jordan and colleagues (2017) found that people will evaluate another person's moral inconsistency less negatively if the other person voluntarily discloses the inconsistency. For example, participants evaluated someone who pirates music more negatively if that person had previously stated that pirating music is wrong – unless the person had simultaneously admitted to occasionally downloading music herself. In the latter case, the person failed to practice what she preached, but ensured that the preaching did not falsely signal her virtue.

However, the false-signaling perspective cannot account for all documented cases of people interpreting moral inconsistency as hypocrisy. Consider a tobacco executive who secretly and anonymously donates to an anti-smoking cause, or a casino executive who secretly and anonymously donates to an anti-gambling cause. These executives are not falsely signaling to the public that they will act virtuously in the future; if anything, their leadership position in a “sin industry” signals the opposite. Yet, our research suggests that people do judge the inconsistency between the executives' public appearance and private virtues as hypocritical in such cases

(O'Connor et al., 2020). We need a different theory of “what counts” as hypocrisy to explain these cases.

4.2.2 The moral-benefits theory

An alternative to the false-signaling perspectives is that an actor's moral inconsistency will only seem hypocritical if it suggests that the actor is claiming an “undeserved moral benefit” (Effron, O'Connor, et al., 2018, p. 65). Moral benefits are intra- or inter-personal rewards that must be earned through moral behavior or character, and include the right to appear and feel virtuous, to influence others' moral behavior, and to pass judgment on the virtue of the choices others have made. For example, observers may assume that an environmental advocate appears moral to others, feels good about herself, tells others to engage in costly environmental behaviors (e.g., to purchase an electric car, or to buy carbon offsets), and looks down on those who forgo these behaviors. In the eyes of observers, she is entitled to these moral benefits if she does the hard work of upholding these environmental values herself. However, if she drives a high-emissions vehicle, eschews carbon offset, and never takes the time to recycle, observers would think she is a hypocrite for enjoying these moral benefits while avoiding the inconvenience and financial cost required to actually help the environment. In this way, hypocrites are like free riders. They claim benefits for themselves without paying the requisite price (Effron, O'Connor, et al., 2018; Jordan et al., 2017).

Like the false-signaling theory, the moral-benefits theory can account for the moderators of hypocrisy perceptions reviewed above (see Effron, O'Connor, et al., 2018). For example, in interdependent (vs. independent) cultural contexts, people may be less likely to view preaching as a personal benefit, and instead view it as a social obligation (Effron, Markus, et al., 2018). As another example, preaching against a misdeed you yourself have committed seems hypocritical

because it involves enjoying both the tangible benefit of committing the misdeed and the moral benefit of preaching; however, suffering for the misdeed reduces the apparent hypocrisy by offsetting these benefits with a cost (Effron & Miller, 2015). “Paying a price” for the misdeeds makes the moral benefits of preaching seem somewhat more deserved.

The moral-benefits theory encompasses the false-signaling theory (O’Connor et al., 2020). The appearance of virtue is a moral benefit, so falsely signaling your virtue is tantamount to claiming a moral benefit you do not deserve. However, the moral-benefits theory is also broader than the false-signaling theory because the appearance of virtue is not the only moral benefit someone can claim. Thus, the moral-benefits theory can account for findings that the false-signaling theory cannot. Consider again the tobacco executive who seems hypocritical for secretly and anonymously donating to an anti-tobacco cause. People think he is hypocritical even though he is not sending false signals about his future behavior to others. He seems hypocritical not because he appears more virtuous than he acts, but because he feels more virtuous than he deserves (O’Connor et al., 2020). People infer that by throwing some money to an anti-tobacco cause, he is “buying off his own conscience on the cheap,” alleviating his guilt for profiting from others’ addiction.

In a study supporting this interpretation (O’Connor et al., 2020, Study 5), we asked participants to read an article about a pharmaceutical executive who promoted dangerous and addictive painkillers, despite knowing about their risks, and who secretly made an anonymous donation to an art museum (modeled on members of the real-world Sackler family, who sold the painkiller OxyContin; Van Zee, 2009). Participants in one condition read no further information (control condition). Those in another condition read that his donation was motivated by guilt about promoting the painkillers, and that the donation successfully alleviated his guilt (guilt-

relief condition). Participants in a third condition also read that guilt motivated his donation, but that in the event, the donation was ineffective at alleviating his guilt (guilt-persists condition).

The results (shown in Figure 6) showed that people thought the executive was more of a hypocrite in the guilt-relief condition than in the other two conditions. What seemed hypocritical to people about his donation was not that it was *motivated* by guilt. In fact, they perceived him as *less* of a hypocrite when he continued to feel guilty after the donation than in the condition that described the donation with no mention of guilt, consistent with the idea that guilt is a “moral emotion” that signals positive moral character (Barasch et al., 2014; Stearns & Parrott, 2012). Instead, what seemed hypocritical was that the donation cleansed his conscience more than participants thought it should have. Consistent with the moral-benefits theory, the data also showed that participants in the guilt-relief condition were more likely than participants in the other conditions to believe that he felt more virtuous than he deserved.

These results support the undeserved moral-benefits theory over the false-signaling theory. Falsely signaling your virtue may be sufficient to seem hypocritical, but is it not necessary. Instead, people will condemn you as a hypocrite if they think you are enjoying an undeserved moral benefit, even if that moral benefit is simply feeling more virtuous than you deserve.

4.3 Summary: Tolerating others’ moral inconsistency

How do people respond to moral inconsistency between what others practice and preach (i.e., word-deed misalignment)? Such inconsistencies often receive condemnation as hypocrisy – but not always. People are more tolerant of inconsistencies between practicing and preaching when others’ practice first and preach later, suffer for their misdeeds, engage in ambiguous transgressions, and are from interdependent cultures (see Effron, O’Connor, et al., 2018). To

understand when and why people condemn inconsistency, we reviewed two theories of “what counts” as hypocrisy – the false-signaling and the moral-benefits theories. Although both theories can account for why word-deed misalignment only seems hypocritical in some situations, only the moral-benefits theory can explain why people think it is hypocritical to feel more virtuous than you deserve (O’Connor et al., 2020).

5. Discussion

People show a surprising degree of, and tolerance for, inconsistency in their moral lives. The present chapter reviewed our research on moral inconsistency, asking why people sometimes behave in morally inconsistent ways themselves, make morally inconsistent judgments of others’ behavior, and tolerate others’ moral inconsistencies.

First, we argued that moral inconsistency in people’s own behavior arises, in large part, from their ability to convince themselves they have a license to sin. People who normally act virtuously will act less-virtuously in situations that afford them a psychological license. We discussed how people feel more comfortable acting in morally questionable ways if they can point to evidence of virtue in their behavioral history – even if the evidence comprises only trivial virtues, or imagined behaviors that one has not actually performed (i.e., counterfactual sins or prefactual virtues). Beyond behavioral history, we next discussed how people can derive a license from others. Getting “vice advice” from an individual, holding membership in an entitative group, or observing a political event in a society can disinhibit people to lie and express prejudice. Beyond licensing, we highlighted how fluctuations in temptation across situations can promote morally inconsistent behavior. When psychological license increases, people feel less inhibited from acting on temptation; when temptation increases, people feel more compelled to act, even if the degree of license they feel has not changed. Together, this research

reveals how inconsistency in people's moral behavior results from the push and pull of psychological license and temptation.

Next, we highlighted three factors that promote moral inconsistency in judgments of *others'* behavior: motivation, imagination, and repetition. Regarding motivation, people excuse themselves, ingroup members, and political allies more than others, outgroup members, and political opponents; regarding imagination, people inconsistently condemn falsehoods, attribute blame, and ascribe hypocrisy based on the counterfactuals and prefactuals that they imagine; and, regarding repetition, people condemn transgressions less severely over time with repeated exposure. Together, this section highlights novel findings that help to explain the common calls of inconsistent treatment of others' moral transgressions on social media platforms and in politics.

Finally, we argued that people will tolerate someone who fails to practice what he or she preaches when they do not interpret such moral inconsistency as hypocrisy. We reviewed several situations in which this inconsistency seems less hypocritical: when the preaching comes after the practicing, when the preacher suffers for what he or she has practiced, when the preacher's wrongdoing is ambiguous, and when the inconsistency is viewed through the lens of an interdependent cultural context. Synthesizing these situations, we argued that inconsistency between an actor's words and deeds only seems hypocritical if people think the actor has claimed an undeserved moral benefit.

5.1 Don't people hate inconsistency?

The moral-benefits theory, discussed earlier, helps explain why people tolerate others' moral inconsistency between their words and deeds. What explains why people tolerate their *own* moral inconsistencies? A foundational assumption in social psychology is that people hate

inconsistency (e.g. Cialdini et al., 1995; Festinger, 1957; Heider, 1958; Osgood & Tannenbaum, 1955; Tedeschi et al., 1971). Given the importance of morality in people's self-views and social lives (Aquino & Reed, 2002; Goodwin et al., 2014; Strohminger & Nichols, 2014), one might think it would be challenging to find examples of moral inconsistency in people's behavior and judgments. Yet in the present chapter, we have reviewed a wide array of situations in which people display moral inconsistency.

In our view, the findings we have reviewed are not actually incompatible with prior work. Our review has focused on examples of moral inconsistencies among *behaviors* (e.g., doing good, then doing bad) and moral inconsistencies among *judgments* (e.g., condemning one person while condoning another for the same behavior). By contrast, prior work (particularly research on cognitive dissonance theory) examines inconsistencies among *cognitions* (see Aronson, 1969; Festinger, 1957; Gawronski & Brannon, 2019) – that is, in how people *think* about their behaviors and judgments. There are several reasons why people could display moral inconsistencies among their behaviors or judgments without experiencing inconsistencies in the way they think about these behaviors or judgments. As the next sections describe, they could fail to notice the inconsistencies among behaviors or judgments, trivialize or tolerate these inconsistencies, or believe they have a good reason for these inconsistencies. As we explain, each of these reasons fits with the tenets of cognitive dissonance theory.

5.1.1 Failure to notice inconsistency

Sometimes, people may simply fail to notice their inconsistencies. Some of the evidence for moral inconsistency we have reviewed comes from between-participants experiments, in which participants in the experimental condition display different moral judgments or behaviors than participants in the control condition (e.g., Effron, 2018; Helgason & Effron, in press). The

results of such experiments allow us to infer that the average participant's moral judgement or behavior would have been different if randomly assigned to one condition or another – but this inference is not salient to participants themselves because they only experience one condition. The real world often resembles a between-participant paradigm in that we only experience one version of history. A political partisan might condone a lie after imagining how it might become true in the future, not realizing that she would have been less inclined to condone the same lie if she had not imagined this future scenario. In line with this explanation, the cognitive dissonance literature finds that people only feel uncomfortable about inconsistency among their cognitions if they hold such cognitions in mind simultaneously (McGregor et al., 1999). Thus, people may feel comfortable with moral inconsistency in part because they are unaware of it.

5.1.2 Trivializing and tolerating inconsistencies

Other times, however, people do notice their moral inconsistencies. Consider the moral self-licensing paradigm, in which people engage in morally questionable behavior *because* they have just acted virtuously (see Effron & Conway, 2015). People are presumably aware that doing bad immediately after doing good represents some degree of inconsistency, yet they nonetheless seem comfortable with such inconsistency. The explanation for this comfort may depend on which of the licensing mechanisms discussed earlier is operating: moral credentials or moral credits.

According to the moral-credentials mechanism, acting virtuously makes subsequent morally questionable behaviors seem less bad (Monin & Miller, 2001). “Doing bad” after “doing good” should feel less inconsistent when the good deeds reduce how wrong the bad deeds seem. As noted, cognitive dissonance theory emphasizes that people are averse to inconsistencies in their *cognitive interpretations* of their behaviors (Festinger, 1957; Gawronski & Brannon, 2019).

By changing how people interpret their bad deeds, the moral-credentials mechanism may allow people to interpret their behaviors as only trivially inconsistent (see Simon et al., 1995).

Alternatively, according to the moral-credits mechanism, good deeds offset bad ones, allowing one to commit moral violations while maintaining a moral-enough self-concept (Miller & Effron, 2010; Nisan, 1991). In this way, people may be willing to accept inconsistencies among their moral behaviors as long as they can view their underlying character as moral (see also Steele, 1988). Thus, whereas the moral-credentials mechanism may reduce how much inconsistency people perceive among their moral behaviors, the moral-credits mechanism may instead increase people's tolerance for any inconsistencies they do perceive (Harmon-Jones et al., 2009).

5.1.3 Believing our moral benefits are deserved

Above, we discussed how people are sometimes willing to excuse others' word-deed misalignment. What about people's *own* word-deed misalignment? On one hand, making people mindful of inconsistencies between what they practice and what they preach can motivate them to align their practicing and preaching (Aronson et al., 1991; Bruneau et al., 2018; Bruneau et al., 2020; Fointiat, 2004; Stone & Fernandez, 2008). For example, when undergraduates were induced to preach about the importance of safe sex and, later, to reflect about how they had not practiced safe sex themselves, they subsequently took more free condoms from a bowl (Stone et al., 1994). Thus, people may strive to avoid blatant moral inconsistencies, and to correct such inconsistencies when committed.

On the other hand, it is not uncommon for people to fail to practice what they preach, as observers of the human condition have told us for millennia (e.g., Buddha in the Dhammapada, verse 252; Jesus in Matthew 7:3-5). Extrapolating from the work on judging others' word-deed

misalignment suggests one possible answer. Even when people notice themselves failing to practice what they preach, they may not interpret this moral inconsistency as hypocrisy. That is, people may rarely perceive their inconsistency as indicating they have enjoyed an undeserved moral benefit. Once people have experienced a tangible benefit, they convince themselves that they deserved it (Diekmann et al., 1997); the same principle may apply to moral benefits. For example, a person who manages to appear virtuous despite acting less-than-virtuously is likely to defend themselves as deserving of that appearance – perhaps because they believe they are a good person deep down (Effron & Monin, 2010), because they think have “paid a price” for acting less-than-virtuously (Effron & Miller, 2015), because they know they feel guilty about acting less-than-virtuously (O’Connor et al., 2020), or even because they did not intend to signal virtue to others (Jordan et al., 2017). (Cognitive-dissonance theorists might characterize such processes as “adding consonant cognitions;” see Festinger, 1957). In short, people may be inclined to make charitable attributions for moral inconsistencies between their words and deeds.

5.2 The benefits of moral inconsistency

The present chapter has focused on the negative consequences of moral inconsistency. We have highlighted how the factors that promote moral inconsistency can allow people to lie, cheat, express prejudice, and reduce their condemnation of others’ morally suspect behaviors ranging from leaving the scene of an accident to spreading fake news. At the same time, people’s apparent proclivity for moral inconsistency is not all bad.

One reason is that, in situations that pit competing moral values against each other, moral inconsistency may be unavoidable. For example, when a friend asks whether you like her unflattering new haircut, you must either say no (which would be inconsistent with your usual kind behavior) or yes (which would be inconsistent with your usual honest behavior; Levine et

al., 2020). If you discover corruption in your workplace, you might need to choose between blowing the whistle (which would be inconsistent with your typically loyal behavior towards the company) or staying silent (which would be inconsistent with your typically fair behavior; Dungan et al., 2015; Waytz et al., 2013).

Another reason is that people who strive for perfect moral consistency may incur steep costs. They may be derogated and shunned by others, who feel threatened and judged by these “do-gooders” (Howe & Monin, 2017; Minson & Monin, 2012; Monin et al., 2008; O’Connor & Monin, 2016). Or they may sacrifice themselves and loved ones more than they can afford, like the young social worker who consistently donated to charity until she and her partner were living on 6% of their already-modest income, or the couple who, wanting to consistently help children in need of a home, adopted 22 kids (MacFarquhar, 2015). In short, we may enjoy greater popularity and an easier life if we allow ourselves at least some moral inconsistency.

Finally, moral inconsistency can sometimes benefit society. Evolving moral beliefs about smoking (Rozin, 1999; Rozin & Singh, 1999) have led to considerable public health benefits. Stalemates in partisan conflict are hard to break if both sides rigidly refuse to change their judgments and behavior surrounding potent moral issues (Brandt et al., 2016). Same-sex marriage, women’s sexual liberation, and racial desegregation required inconsistency in how people treated actions that were once considered moral wrongs. In this way, moral inconsistency may be necessary for moral progress.

5.3 Future directions

We see a number of interesting questions that future research on moral inconsistency could address.

5.3.1 How do people think about their own versus others’ moral inconsistency?

The present chapter offered a number of examples of how people appear to tolerate both their own and others' moral inconsistencies. However, research on people's own moral inconsistency and research on their reactions to others' moral inconsistencies have been conducted in almost entirely separate literatures. Moreover, the types of inconsistencies examined in each literature are not directly comparable (e.g., unlike the literature on people's own inconsistencies, the literature on judgments of others' inconsistencies focuses mainly on word-deed misalignment; see Effron, O'Connor, et al., 2018). Few studies directly compare how people think about their own and others' moral inconsistency. Thus, it is unclear whether we treat moral inconsistency differently as a function of who performs it – ourselves or others.

One hypothesis is that, all else equal, people are more tolerant of their own inconsistency than of others' inconsistency. This inconsistency in how people judge inconsistency might be called *meta-inconsistency*. Indirect evidence for meta-inconsistency comes from four sources. First, as noted, people pass more lenient judgments on their own moral transgressions than on others' (identical) moral transgressions, whether because people are more motivated to excuse themselves than others (e.g., Lammers, 2012) or because they have access to different information than others (Kim et al., 2021). For the same reasons, people might form more lenient judgments of their own versus others' moral inconsistency. Second, participants in one study recalled more examples of others' hypocrisy than their own, and the examples they did recall encompassed a wider range of situations when thinking about others versus themselves (Hale & Pillow, 2015). One reason could be that people more readily interpret others' behavior, compared to their own, as inconsistent. Third, people perceive inconsistency as more hypocritical when performed by someone who opposed, versus supported, their favored political causes (Helgason & Effron, 2022), and when performed by an acquaintance versus a friend (DeAndrea & Walther,

2011). Finally, people generate more reasons to explain away their own inconsistencies than others' inconsistencies (DeAndrea & Walther, 2011). Future research should seek more direct evidence of meta-inconsistency – when and why do people condone their own moral inconsistencies more than others?

5.3.2 Are people more tolerant of moral inconsistency with past behavior or with stated values?

Some of the examples of moral inconsistency we described involve failing to be similarly virtuous across time or situations; other examples we described involve failing to uphold the principles one has endorsed (i.e., not practicing what you preach). Sometimes, people face situations that force them to choose between one type of moral inconsistency or the other (Berman et al., 2020). Consider a life-long environmentalist who learns that recycling plastic is bad for the environment. In her country, recycled plastic is either burned or shipped to China for recycling, both of which emit more carbon than simply burying the plastic would emit (Verma et al., 2016). If she stops recycling, she is inconsistent with her prior behavior; if she keeps recycling, she is inconsistent with her stated values. Which type of inconsistency will she choose? How will observers evaluate her choice? Are people more tolerant of one type of inconsistency than other? Future research should investigate these questions.

5.3.3 How do people think about moral inconsistencies over long periods of time?

The studies we reviewed examined moral inconsistencies in brief experimental situations. In the studies of how behavioral history promotes moral inconsistency, an opportunity to “do good” is almost immediately followed by an opportunity to “do bad” (for a review, see Effron, 2016). In the research on how motivation promotes inconsistency in moral judgements, participants made (relatively lax) judgments of falsehoods that aligned with their politics in the

same study as they made (relatively harsh) judgments of falsehoods that were misaligned with their politics. In the real world, however, longer time periods can elapse between a first morally relevant behavior or judgment and a subsequent one. Research has yet to provide much insight about people's willingness to enact and condone moral inconsistency that occurs across these longer time frames.

One possibility is that people are more likely to enact and condone moral inconsistency that occurs over longer versus shorter timeframes – and not just because the distant past is easier to forget than the recent past. The more time that has elapsed since a particular moral behavior or judgment, the less continuity people will perceive between their current and past selves, and the easier it may be to separate themselves from their past actions (see Helgason & Berman, in press). Thus, excusing the same behavior you condemned 20 years ago seems less inconsistent than excusing the same behavior you condemned 2 minutes ago. For the same reason, when long periods of time pass between when a third party says one thing and when they do another, we may be less likely to attribute this inconsistency to hypocrisy, because we expect people's thinking and values to evolve over time. Working for Exxon Mobile in 2022 seems less hypocritical if you joined a protest against the oil industry in 1977 as opposed to 2021. At the same time, doing good seems less likely to license doing bad when long versus short periods of time have elapsed since doing good (e.g., years vs. days). The good deeds you did 20 years ago say more about your moral character back then as opposed to now. Future research should thus investigate moral inconsistencies that occur over a longer timeframe than the typically experimental session.

6. Conclusion

A certain degree of moral consistency is essential to a well-functioning society. Behaving consistently moral enables us trust one another, judging others' wrongdoing consistently upholds norms of fairness, and condemning others' moral inconsistency – particularly those who preach virtue while practicing vice – discourages people from taking advantage of us. Yet, as we have shown in this chapter, a number of factors lead people to act in morally inconsistent ways, to levy morally inconsistent judgments on others' behavior, and – in some situations – to tolerate moral inconsistency in others. For better or for worse, inconsistency may be a fixture in our moral lives.

References

- Abrams, D., Randsley de Moura, G., & Travaglino, G. A. (2013). A double standard when group members behave badly: Transgression credit to ingroup leaders. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, *105*(5), 799-815. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0033600>
- Alicke, M. D., Gordon, E., & Rose, D. (2013). Hypocrisy: What counts? *Philosophical Psychology*, *26*(5), 673-701.
- Aquino, K., & Reed, A., II. (2002). The self-importance of moral identity. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, *83*(6), 1423-1440. <https://doi.org/10.1037//0022-3514.83.6.1423>
- Aronson, E. (1969). The theory of cognitive dissonance: A current perspective. In L. Berkowitz (Ed.), *Advances in experimental social psychology* (Vol. 4, pp. 1-34). Elsevier.
- Aronson, E., Fried, C., & Stone, J. (1991). Overcoming denial and increasing the intention to use condoms through the induction of hypocrisy. *American Journal of Public Health*, *81*(12), 1636-1638. <https://doi.org/10.2105/Ajph.81.12.1636>
- Avramova, Y. R., & Inbar, Y. (2013). Emotion and moral judgment. *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Cognitive Science*, *4*(2), 169-178. <https://doi.org/10.1002/wcs.1216>
- Ayal, S., & Gino, F. (2012). Honest rationales for dishonest behavior. In M. Mikulincer & P. R. Shaver (Eds.), *The social psychology of morality: Exploring the causes of good and evil* (pp. 149-166). American Psychological Association.
- Baker, P., & Sang-Hun, C. (2017, August 8). Trump threatens “fire and fury” against North Korea if it endangers U.S. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/08/world/asia/north-korea-un-sanctions-nuclear-missile-united-nations.html>
- Bandura, A. (1999). Moral disengagement in the perpetration of inhumanities. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, *3*(3), 193-209. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327957pspr0303_3
- Barasch, A., Levine, E. E., Berman, J. Z., & Small, D. A. (2014). Selfish or selfless? On the signal value of emotion in altruistic behavior. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, *107*(3), 393-413. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0037207>
- Barden, J., Rucker, D. D., & Petty, R. E. (2005). "Saying one thing and doing another": Examining the impact of event order on hypocrisy judgments of others. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *31*(11), 1463-1474. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167205276430>
- Barden, J., Rucker, D. D., Petty, R. E., & Rios, K. (2014). Order of actions mitigates hypocrisy judgments for ingroup more than outgroup members. *Group Processes and Intergroup Relations*, *17*(5), 590-601. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1368430213510192>
- Barkan, R., Ayal, S., & Ariely, D. (2015). Ethical dissonance, justifications, and moral behavior. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, *6*, 157-166. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2015.08.001>
- Barnes, C. M., Schaubroeck, J., Huth, M., & Ghumman, S. (2011). Lack of sleep and unethical conduct. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, *115*(2), 169-180. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.obhdp.2011.01.009>
- Bartels, D. M., Bauman, C. W., Cushman, F., Pizarro, D. A., & McGraw, A. P. (2015). Moral judgment and decision making. In G. Keren & G. Wu (Eds.), *The Wiley Blackwell handbook of judgment and decision making* (pp. 478-515). Wiley.
- Bassarak, C., Leib, M., Mischkowski, D., Strang, S., Glöckner, A., & Shalvi, S. (2017). What provides justification for cheating—producing or observing counterfactuals? *Journal of Behavioral Decision Making*, *30*(4), 964-975. <https://doi.org/10.1002/bdm.2013>
- Batson, C. D. (2002). Justice motivation and moral motivation. In M. Ross & D. T. Miller (Eds.), *The justice motive in everyday life* (pp. 91-106). Cambridge University Press.
- Bazerman, M. H., & Sezer, O. (2016). Bounded awareness: Implications for ethical decision making. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, *136*, 95-105. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.obhdp.2015.11.004>
- Bazerman, M. H., & Tenbrunsel, A. E. (2011). *Blind spots: Why we fail to do what's right and what to do about it*. Princeton University Press.
- BBC News. (2018, August 10). Laura Ingraham: Demographic changes “national emergency”. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-45146811>
- Berman, J. Z., Overton, G., & Effron, D. A. (2020). Damned either way: Hypocrisy judgments when goals and commitments conflict. In *Advances in Consumer Research [Conference Proceedings]* (Vol. 48, pp. 1096-1100). Association for Consumer Research.

- Bhatti, Y., Hansen, K. M., & Olsen, A. L. (2013). Political hypocrisy: The effect of political scandals on candidate evaluations. *Acta Politica*, 48(4), 408-428. <https://doi.org/10.1057/ap.2013.6>
- Blanken, I., van de Ven, N., & Zeelenberg, M. (2015). A meta-analytic review of moral licensing. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 41(4), 540-558. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167215572134>
- Blanken, I., van de Ven, N., Zeelenberg, M., & Meijers, M. H. (2014). Three attempts to replicate the moral licensing effect. *Social Psychology*, 45(3), 232-238. <https://doi.org/10.1027/1864-9335/a000189>
- Bloom, P. (2017). Empathy and its discontents. *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, 21(1), 24-31. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tics.2016.11.004>
- Bocian, K., & Wojciszke, B. (2014). Self-interest bias in moral judgments of others' actions. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 40(7), 898-909. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167214529800>
- Bonaccio, S., & Dalal, R. S. (2006). Advice taking and decision-making: An integrative literature review, and implications for the organizational sciences. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 101(2), 127-151. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.obhdp.2006.07.001>
- Bradley-Geist, J. C., King, E. B., Skorinko, J., Hebl, M. R., & McKenna, C. (2010). Moral credentialing by association: The importance of choice and relationship closeness. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 36(11), 1564-1575. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167210385920>
- Brandt, M. J., Wetherell, G., & Crawford, J. T. (2016). Moralization and intolerance of ideological outgroups. In J. P. Forgas, L. Jussim, & P. A. M. V. Lange (Eds.), *The social psychology of morality* (pp. 239-256). Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315644189>
- Briazu, R. A., Walsh, C. R., Deepröse, C., & Ganis, G. (2017). Undoing the past in order to lie in the present: Counterfactual thinking and deceptive communication. *Cognition*, 161, 66-73. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cognition.2017.01.003>
- Brigham, J. C. (1993). College students' racial attitudes. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 23(23), 1933-1967. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1559-1816.1993.tb01074.x>
- Brock, T. C., & Brannon, L. A. (1992). Liberalization of commodity theory. *Basic and Applied Social Psychology*, 13(1), 135-144. [https://doi.org/DOI 10.1207/s15324834basp1301_11](https://doi.org/DOI%2010.1207/s15324834basp1301_11)
- Brown, R. P., Tamborski, M., Wang, X., Barnes, C. D., Mumford, M. D., Connelly, S., & Devenport, L. D. (2011). Moral credentialing and the rationalization of misconduct. *Ethics and Behavior*, 21(1), 1-12. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10508422.2011.537566>
- Bruneau, E., Kteily, N., & Falk, E. (2018). Interventions highlighting hypocrisy reduce collective blame of Muslims for individual acts of violence and assuage anti-Muslim hostility. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 44(3), 430-448. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167217744197>
- Bruneau, E. G., Kteily, N. S., & Urbiola, A. (2020). A collective blame hypocrisy intervention enduringly reduces hostility towards Muslims. *Nature Human Behaviour*, 4(1), 45-54. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41562-019-0747-7>
- Bryan, C. J., Adams, G. S., & Monin, B. (2013). When cheating would make you a cheater: Implicating the self prevents unethical behavior. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General*, 142(4), 1001-1005. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0030655>
- Bucciarelli, M., Khemlani, S., & Johnson-Laird, P. N. (2008). The psychology of moral reasoning. *Judgment and Decision Making*, 3(2), 121-139.
- Buehler, R., Griffin, D., & Peetz, J. (2010). The planning fallacy: Cognitive, motivational, and social origins. *Advances in experimental social psychology*, 43, 1-62. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0065-2601\(10\)43001-4](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0065-2601(10)43001-4)
- Buehler, R., Griffin, D., & Ross, M. (1994). Exploring the "planning fallacy": Why people underestimate their task completion times. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 67(3), 366-381. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.67.3.366>
- Byrne, R. M. J. (2017). Counterfactual thinking: From logic to morality. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 26(4), 314-322. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0963721417695617>
- Campbell, D. T. (1958). Common fate, similarity, and other indices of the status of aggregates of person as social entities. *Behavioral Sciences*, 3, 14-25.
- Campbell, R. (2017). Learning from moral inconsistency. *Cognition*, 167, 46-57. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cognition.2017.05.006>
- Campbell, T., O'Brien, E., Van Boven, L., Schwarz, N., & Ubel, P. (2014). Too much experience: A desensitization bias in emotional perspective taking. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 106(2), 272-285. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0035148>

- Cascio, J., & Plant, E. A. (2015). Prospective moral licensing: Does anticipating doing good later allow you to be bad now? *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 56, 110-116. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2014.09.009>
- Cha, S. E., & Edmondson, A. C. (2006). When values backfire: Leadership, attribution, and disenchantment in a values-driven organization. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 17(1), 57-78. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2005.10.006>
- Christian, M. S., & Ellis, A. P. (2011). Examining the effects of sleep deprivation on workplace deviance: A self-regulatory perspective. *Academy of Management Journal*, 54(5), 913-934. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2010.0179>
- Chugh, D., Bazerman, M. H., & Banaji, M. R. (2005). Bounded ethicality as a psychological barrier to recognizing conflicts of interest. In D. A. Moore, D. M. Cain, G. F. Lowenstein, & M. H. Bazerman (Eds.), *Conflicts of interest: Challenges and solutions in business, law, medicine, and public policy* (pp. 74-95). Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511610332.006>
- Chugh, D., & Kern, M. C. (2016). A dynamic and cyclical model of bounded ethicality. *Research in Organizational Behavior*, 36, 85-100. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.riob.2016.07.002>
- Cialdini, R. B. (1988). *Influence: Science and practice*. Harper Collins.
- Cialdini, R. B., Trost, M. R., & Newsom, J. T. (1995). Preference for consistency: The development of a valid measure and the discovery of surprising behavioral implications. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 69(2), 318. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.69.2.318>
- Clot, S., Grolleau, G., & Ibanez, L. (2014). Smug alert! Exploring self-licensing behaviour in a cheating game. *Economics Letters*, 123(2), 191-194. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.econlet.2014.01.039>
- Conway, P., & Peetz, J. (2012). When does feeling moral actually make you a better person? Conceptual abstraction moderates whether past moral deeds motivate consistency or compensatory behavior. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 38(7), 907-919. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167212442394>
- Cornelissen, G., Bashshur, M. R., & Rode, J. (2013). Rules or consequences? The role of ethical mindsets in moral dynamics. *Psychological Science*, 24(4), 482-488. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797612457376>
- Craig, M. A., & Richeson, J. A. (2014). More diverse yet less tolerant? How the increasingly diverse racial landscape affects White Americans' racial attitudes. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 40(6), 750-761. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167214524993>
- Crandall, C. S., Eshleman, A., & O'Brien, L. (2002). Social norms and the expression and suppression of prejudice: The struggle for internalization. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 82(3), 359-378. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/11902622>
- Crandall, C. S., Miller, J. M., & White, M. H. (2018). Changing norms following the 2016 US presidential election: The Trump effect on prejudice. *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, 9(2), 186-192. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1948550617750735>
- Crump, S. A., Hamilton, D. L., Sherman, S. J., Lickel, B., & Thakkar, V. (2010). Group entitativity and similarity: Their differing patterns in perceptions of groups. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 40(7), 1212-1230. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ejsp.716>
- DeAndrea, D. C., & Walther, J. B. (2011). Attributions for inconsistencies between online and offline self-presentations. *Communication research*, 38(6), 805-825. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0093650210385340>
- Dechêne, A., Stahl, C., Hansen, J., & Wänke, M. (2010). The truth about the truth: A meta-analytic review of the truth effect. *Personality and Social Psychological Review*, 14(2), 238-257. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1088868309352251>
- Denson, T. F., Lickel, B., Curtis, M., Stenstrom, D. M., & Ames, D. R. (2006). The roles of entitativity and essentiality in judgments of collective responsibility. *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations*, 9(1), 43-61. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1368430206059857>
- Diekmann, K. A., Samuels, S. M., Ross, L., & Bazerman, M. H. (1997). Self-interest and fairness in problems of resource allocation: Allocators versus recipients. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 72(5), 1061-1074. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.72.5.1061>
- Dijksterhuis, A., & Smith, P. K. (2002). Affective habituation: Subliminal exposure to extreme stimuli decreases their extremity. *Emotion*, 2(3), 203-214. <https://doi.org/10.1037/1528-3542.2.3.203>
- Ditto, P. H., Pizarro, D. A., & Tannenbaum, D. (2009). Motivated moral reasoning. In H. R. Brian (Ed.), *Psychology of Learning and Motivation* (Vol. 50, pp. 307-338). Academic Press. [https://doi.org/10.1016/s0079-7421\(08\)00410-6](https://doi.org/10.1016/s0079-7421(08)00410-6)

- Dong, M., van Prooijen, J.-W., Wu, S., & van Lange, P. A. (2022). Culture, status, and hypocrisy: High-status people who don't practice what they preach are viewed as worse in the United States than China. *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, 13(1), 60-69.
- Druckman, J. N., & McGrath, M. C. (2019). The evidence for motivated reasoning in climate change preference formation. *Nature Climate Change*, 9(2), 111-119. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41558-018-0360-1>
- Duke, A. A., & Bègue, L. (2015). The drunk utilitarian: Blood alcohol concentration predicts utilitarian responses in moral dilemmas. *Cognition*, 134, 121-127. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cognition.2014.09.006>
- Dungan, J., Waytz, A., & Young, L. (2015). The psychology of whistleblowing. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 6, 129-133.
- Ebersole, C. R., Atherton, O. E., Belanger, A. L., Skulborstad, H. M., Allen, J. M., Banks, J. B., Baranski, E., Bernstein, M. J., Bonfiglio, D. B., & Boucher, L. (2016). Many Labs 3: Evaluating participant pool quality across the academic semester via replication. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 67, 68-82. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2015.10.012>
- Effron, D. A. (2014). Making mountains of morality from molehills of virtue: Threat causes people to overestimate their moral credentials. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 40(8), 972-985. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167214533131>
- Effron, D. A. (2016). Beyond "being good frees us to be bad:" Moral self-licensing and the fabrication of moral credentials. In P. A. Van Lange & J.-W. van Prooijen (Eds.), *Cheating, corruption, and concealment: Roots of unethical behavior* (pp. 33-54). Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781316225608>
- Effron, D. A. (2018). It could have been true: How counterfactual thoughts reduce condemnation of falsehoods and increase political polarization. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 44(5), 729-745. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167217746152>
- Effron, D. A. (in press). The moral repetition effect: Bad deeds seem less unethical when repeatedly encountered. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General*. <https://doi.org/10.1037/xge0001214>
- Effron, D. A., Bryan, C. J., & Murnighan, J. K. (2015). Cheating at the end to avoid regret. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 109(3), 395-414. <https://doi.org/10.1037/pspa0000026>
- Effron, D. A., Cameron, J. S., & Monin, B. (2009). Endorsing Obama licenses favoring Whites. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 45(3), 590-593. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2009.02.001>
- Effron, D. A., & Conway, P. (2015). When virtue leads to villainy: Advances in research on moral self-licensing. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 6, 32-35. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2015.03.017>
- Effron, D. A., & Helgason, B. A. (2022). The moral psychology of misinformation: Why we excuse dishonesty in a post-truth world. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 47, 101375. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2022.101375>
- Effron, D. A., Kakkar, H., & Cable, D. M. (in press). Consequences of perceiving organization members as a unified entity: Stronger attraction, but greater blame for member transgressions. *Journal of Applied Psychology*. <https://doi.org/10.1037/apl0000992>
- Effron, D. A., Kakkar, H., & Knowles, E. D. (2018). Group cohesion benefits individuals who express prejudice, but harms their group. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 79, 239-251. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2018.08.002>
- Effron, D. A., & Knowles, E. D. (2015). Entitativity and intergroup bias: How belonging to a cohesive group allows people to express their prejudices. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 108(2), 234-253. <https://doi.org/10.1037/pspa0000020>
- Effron, D. A., Lucas, B. J., & O'Connor, K. (2015). Hypocrisy by association: When organizational membership increases condemnation for wrongdoing. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 130, 147-159. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.obhdp.2015.05.001>
- Effron, D. A., Markus, H. R., Jackman, L. M., Muramoto, Y., & Muluk, H. (2018). Hypocrisy and culture: Failing to practice what you preach receives harsher interpersonal reactions in independent (vs interdependent) cultures. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 76, 371-384. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2017.12.009>
- Effron, D. A., & Miller, D. T. (2012). How the moralization of issues grants social legitimacy to act on one's attitudes. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 38(5), 690-701. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167211435982>
- Effron, D. A., & Miller, D. T. (2015). Do as I say, not as I've done: Suffering for a misdeed reduces the hypocrisy of advising others against it. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 131, 16-32. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.obhdp.2015.07.004>

- Effron, D. A., Miller, D. T., & Monin, B. (2012). Inventing racist roads not taken: The licensing effect of immoral counterfactual behaviors. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 103(6), 916-932. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0030008>
- Effron, D. A., & Monin, B. (2010). Letting people off the hook: When do good deeds excuse transgressions? *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 36(12), 1618-1634. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167210385922>
- Effron, D. A., Monin, B., & Miller, D. T. (2013). The unhealthy road not taken: Licensing indulgence by exaggerating counterfactual sins. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 49(3), 573-578. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2012.08.012>
- Effron, D. A., O'Connor, K., Leroy, H., & Lucas, B. J. (2018). From inconsistency to hypocrisy: When does "saying one thing but doing another" invite condemnation? *Research in Organizational Behavior*, 38, 61-75. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.riob.2018.10.003>
- Effron, D. A., & Raj, M. (2020). Misinformation and morality: Encountering fake-news headlines makes them seem less unethical to publish and share. *Psychological Science*, 31(1), 75-87. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797619887896>
- Epley, N., & Dunning, D. (2000). Feeling "holier than thou": Are self-serving assessments produced by errors in self- or social prediction? *Journal of Personality & Social Psychology*, 79(6), 861-875. <https://doi.org/10.1037//0022-3514.79.6.861>
- Epstude, K., Effron, D. A., & Roese, N. J. (in press). Polarized imagination: Partisanship influences the direction and consequences of counterfactual thinking. *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences*.
- Epstude, K., & Roese, N. J. (2008). The functional theory of counterfactual thinking. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 12(2), 168-192. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1088868308316091>
- Epstude, K., Scholl, A., & Roese, N. J. (2016). Prefactual thoughts: Mental simulations about what might happen. *Review of General Psychology*, 20(1), 48-56. <https://doi.org/10.1037/gpr0000064>
- Faul, F., Erdfelder, E., Lang, A.-G., & Buchner, A. (2007). G*Power 3: A flexible statistical power analysis program for the social, behavioral, and biomedical sciences. *Behavior Research Methods*, 39, 175-191.
- Festinger, L. (1957). *A theory of cognitive dissonance*. Row, Peterson.
- Fointiat, V. (2004). "I know what I have to do, but..." when hypocrisy leads to behavioral change. *Social Behavior and Personality*, 32(8), 741-746.
- Forsythe, M., & Bogdanich, W. (2021, February 3). McKinsey settles for nearly \$600 million over role in opioid crisis. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/02/03/business/mckinsey-opioids-settlement.html>
- Friedman, R., Hong, Y. Y., Simons, T., Chi, S. C., Oh, S. H., & Lachowicz, M. (2018). The impact of culture on reactions to promise breaches: Differences between East and West in behavioral integrity perceptions. *Group & Organization Management*, 43(2), 273-315. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1059601116678101>
- Gai, P. J., & Bhattacharjee, A. (in press). Willpower as moral ability. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General*. <https://doi.org/10.1037/xge0001169>
- Garrett, N., Lazzaro, S. C., Ariely, D., & Sharot, T. (2016). The brain adapts to dishonesty. *Nature Neuroscience*, 19(12), 1727-1732. <https://doi.org/10.1038/nn.4426>
- Gawronski, B., & Brannon, S. M. (2019). What is cognitive consistency, and why does it matter? In E. Harmon-Jones (Ed.), *Cognitive dissonance: Reexamining a pivotal theory in psychology*, 2nd ed. (pp. 91-116). American Psychological Association. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0000135-005>
- Georgeac, O. A. M., & Rattan, A. (2019). Progress in women's representation in top leadership weakens people's disturbance with gender inequality in other domains. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General*, 148(8), 1435-1453. <https://doi.org/10.1037/xge0000561>
- Georgeac, O. A. M., Rattan, A., & Effron, D. A. (2019). An exploratory investigation of Americans' expression of gender bias before and after the 2016 presidential election. *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, 10(5), 632-642. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1948550618776624>
- Gholamzadehmir, M., Sparks, P., & Farsides, T. (2019). Moral licensing, moral cleansing and pro-environmental behaviour: The moderating role of pro-environmental attitudes. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 65, 101334. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jenvp.2019.101334>
- Gilbert, D. T., & Jones, E. E. (1986). Exemplification: The self-presentation of moral character. *Journal of Personality*, 54(3), 593-593. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6494.1986.tb00414.x>
- Gino, F. (2015). Understanding ordinary unethical behavior: Why people who value morality act immorally. *Current Opinion in Behavioral Sciences*, 3, 107-111. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cobeha.2015.03.001>

- Gino, F., Ayal, S., & Ariely, D. (2013). Self-serving altruism? The lure of unethical actions that benefit others. *Journal of Economic Behavior and Organization*, 93, 285-292. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jebo.2013.04.005>
- Gino, F., & Galinsky, A. D. (2012). Vicarious dishonesty: When psychological closeness creates distance from one's moral compass. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 119(1), 15-26. <https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.obhdp.2012.03.011>
- Gino, F., Schweitzer, M. E., Mead, N. L., & Ariely, D. (2011). Unable to resist temptation: How self-control depletion promotes unethical behavior. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 115(2), 191-203. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.obhdp.2011.03.001>
- Gino, F., Shu, L. L., & Bazerman, M. H. (2010). Nameless + harmless = blameless: When seemingly irrelevant factors influence judgment of (un)ethical behavior. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 111(2), 93-101. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.obhdp.2009.11.001>
- Giurge, L. M., Lin, E. H.-L., & Effron, D. A. (2021). Moral credentials and the 2020 Democratic presidential primary: No evidence that endorsing female candidates licenses people to favor men. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 95, 104144. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2021.104144>
- Goodman, J. D., & Hakim, D. (2021, March 5). Cuomo aides rewrote nursing home report to hide higher death toll. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/03/04/nyregion/cuomo-nursing-home-deaths.html>
- Goodwin, G. P., Piazza, J., & Rozin, P. (2014). Moral character predominates in person perception and evaluation. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 106(1), 148-168. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0034726>
- Graham, J., Haidt, J., Koleva, S., Motyl, M., Iyer, R., Wojcik, S., & Ditto, P. H. (2013). Moral foundations theory: The pragmatic validity of moral pluralism. *Advances in experimental social psychology*, 47, 55-130. <https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-12-407236-7.00002-4>
- Graso, M., Chen, F. X., & Reynolds, T. (2021). Moralization of Covid-19 health response: Asymmetry in tolerance for human costs. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 93, 104084. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2020.104084>
- Greenbaum, R. L., Mawritz, M. B., & Piccolo, R. F. (2015). When leader fail to "walk the talk": Supervisor undermining and perceptions of leader hypocrisy. *Journal of Management*, 41(3), 929-956. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206312442386>
- Greene, J., & Haidt, J. (2002). How (and where) does moral judgment work? *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, 6(12), 517-523.
- Greene, J. D., Morelli, S. A., Lowenberg, K., Nystrom, L. E., & Cohen, J. D. (2008). Cognitive load selectively interferes with utilitarian moral judgment. *Cognition*, 107(3), 1144-1154. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cognition.2007.11.004>
- Greene, J. D., Sommerville, R. B., Nystrom, L. E., Darley, J. M., & Cohen, J. D. (2001). An fMRI investigation of emotional engagement in moral judgment. *Science*, 293(5537), 2105-2108. <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.1062872>
- Greenwald, A. G., McGhee, D. E., & Schwartz, J. L. (1998). Measuring individual differences in implicit cognition: the Implicit Association Test. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 74(6), 1464. <https://doi.org/10.1037//0022-3514.74.6.1464>
- Griep, Y., Germeyns, L., & Kraak, J. M. (2021). Unpacking the relationship between organizational citizenship behavior and counterproductive work behavior: Moral licensing and temporal focus. *Group & Organization Management*, 46(5), 819-856. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1059601121995366>
- Grover, S. L., & Hasel, M. C. (2015). How leaders recover (or not) from publicized sex scandals. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 129(1), 177-194. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-014-2146-3>
- Gunia, B. C., Barnes, C. M., & Sah, S. (2014). The morality of larks and owls: Unethical behavior depends on chronotype as well as time of day. *Psychological Science*, 25(12), 2272-2274. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797614541989>
- Haidt, J. (2001). The emotional dog and its rational tail: A social intuitionist approach to moral judgment. *Psychological Review*, 108(4), 814-834. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295x.108.4.814>
- Haidt, J., & Kesebir, S. (2010). Morality. In S. T. Fiske, D. T. Gilbert, & G. Lindzey (Eds.), *Handbook of Social Psychology* (5th ed., pp. 797-832). Wiley.
- Hale, W. J., & Pillow, D. R. (2015). Asymmetries in perceptions of self and others' hypocrisy: Rethinking the meaning and perception of the construct. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 45(1), 88-98. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ejsp.2064>
- Hamilton, D. L., & Sherman, S. J. (1996). Perceiving persons and groups. *Psychological Review*, 103(2), 336-355. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295x.103.2.336>

- Harmon-Jones, E., Amodio, D. M., & Harmon-Jones, C. (2009). Action-based model of dissonance: A review, integration, and expansion of conceptions of cognitive conflict. In M. P. Zanna (Ed.), *Advances in experimental social psychology* (Vol. 41, pp. 119-166). Elsevier. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0065-2601\(08\)00403-6](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0065-2601(08)00403-6)
- Harrell, E. (2008). Austria's sex-slave father tells his side of the story. *Time*. Retrieved 5/14/11, from <http://content.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1853330,00.html>
- Heider, F. (1958). *The psychology of interpersonal relations*. Wiley.
- Helgason, B. A., & Berman, J. Z. (in press). Reflecting on identity change facilitates confession of past misdeeds. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General*. <https://doi.org/10.1037/xge0001180>
- Helgason, B. A., & Effron, D. A. (2022). From critical to hypocritical: Counterfactual thinking increases partisan disagreement about media hypocrisy. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 101*, 104308. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2022.104308>
- Helgason, B. A., & Effron, D. A. (in press). It might become true: How prefactual thinking licenses dishonesty. *Journal of personality and social psychology*. <https://doi.org/10.1037/pspa0000308>
- Helgason, B. A., & Effron, D. A. (in progress). Vice advice: Using others' opinions as license to sin.
- Helgason, B. A., Langdon, J. A., Qiu, J., & Effron, D. A. (in progress). "You get the idea:" How believing a falsehood's gist reduces moral condemnation and amplifies partisan disagreement.
- Hoffman, A. M., & Kaire, J. (2020). Comfortably numb: Effects of prolonged media coverage. *Journal of Conflict Resolution, 64*(9), 1666-1692. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002720907675>
- Hofmann, W., Gawronski, B., Gschwendner, T., Le, H., & Schmitt, M. (2005). A meta-analysis on the correlation between the Implicit Association Test and explicit self-report measures. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 31*(10), 1369-1385. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167205275613>
- Hofmann, W., Meindl, P., Mooijman, M., & Graham, J. (2018). Morality and self-control: How they are intertwined and where they differ. *Current Directions in Psychological Science, 27*(4), 286-291. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0963721418759317>
- Hofmann, W., Wisneski, D. C., Brandt, M. J., & Skitka, L. J. (2014). Morality in everyday life. *Science, 345*(6202), 1340-1343. <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.1251560>
- Howe, L. C., & Monin, B. (2017). Healthier than thou? "Practicing what you preach" backfires by increasing anticipated devaluation. *Journal of personality and social psychology, 112*(5), 718-735.
- Inzlicht, M., & Friese, M. (2019). The past, present, and future of ego depletion. *Social Psychology, 50*(5-6), 370-378. <https://doi.org/10.1027/1864-9335/a000398>
- Johnson, J. T. (1986). The knowledge of what might have been: Affective and attributional consequences of near outcomes. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 12*(1), 51-62. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167286121006>
- Jordan, J., Mullen, E., & Murnighan, J. K. (2011). Striving for the moral self: The effects of recalling past moral actions on future moral behavior. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 37*(5), 701-713. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167211400208>
- Jordan, J. J., Sommers, R., Bloom, P., & Rand, D. G. (2017). Why do we hate hypocrites? Evidence for a theory of false signaling. *Psychological Science, 28*(3), 189-202. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797616685771>
- Kahan, D. M. (2016). The politically motivated reasoning paradigm, part 1: What politically motivated reasoning is and how to measure it. In R. A. Scott, S. M. Kosslyn, & M. Buchmann (Eds.), *Emerging Trends in the Social and Behavioral Sciences* (pp. 1-16). John Wiley & Sons, Ltd. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118900772.etrds0417>
- Khan, U., & Dhar, R. (2006). Licensing effect in consumer choice. *Journal of Marketing Research, 43*(2), 259-266. <https://doi.org/10.1509/jmkr.43.2.259>
- Khan, U., & Dhar, R. (2007). Where there is a way, there is a will? The effect of future choices on self-control. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General, 136*, 277-288. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0096-3445.136.2.277>
- Kievit, D. L., LaCrosse, J., Mallinas, S. R., March, D. S., Kunstman, J. W., Zabel, K. L., Olson, M. A., & Plant, E. A. (in press). Changes in nonprejudiced motivations track shifts in the US sociopolitical climate. *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13684302221089768>
- Kim, P. H., Wiltermuth, S. S., & Newman, D. T. (2021). A theory of ethical accounting and its implications for hypocrisy in organizations. *Academy of Management Review, 46*(1), 172-191. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.2018.0161>
- Klayman, J., & Ha, Y.-W. (1987). Confirmation, disconfirmation, and information in hypothesis testing. *Psychological Review, 94*(2), 211. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295x.94.2.211>

- Klotz, A. C., & Bolino, M. C. (2013). Citizenship and counterproductive work behavior: A moral licensing view. *Academy of Management Review*, 38(2), 292-306. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.2011.0109>
- Koehler, D. J. (1991). Explanation, imagination, and confidence in judgment. *Psychological Bulletin*, 110(3), 499. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.110.3.499>
- Kogut, T., & Ritov, I. (2015). Target dependent ethics: discrepancies between ethical decisions toward specific and general targets. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 6, 145-149. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2015.08.005>
- Kouchaki, M. (2011). Vicarious moral licensing: The influence of others' past moral actions on moral behavior. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 101(4), 702-715. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0024552>
- Kouchaki, M., & Gino, F. (2016). Memories of unethical actions become obfuscated over time. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 113(22), 6166-6171. <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1523586113>
- Kouchaki, M., & Smith, I. H. (2014). The morning morality effect: The influence of time of day on unethical behavior. *Psychological Science*, 25(1), 95-102. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797613498099>
- Kreps, T. A., Laurin, K., & Merritt, A. C. (2017). Hypocritical flip-flop, or courageous evolution? When leaders change their moral minds. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 113(5), 730-752. <https://doi.org/10.1037/pspi0000103>
- Kruger, J., & Gilovich, T. (2004). Actions, intentions, and self-assessment: The road to self-enhancement is paved with good intentions. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 30(3), 328-339. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167203259932>
- Krumm, A. J., & Corning, A. F. (2008). Who believes us when we try to conceal our prejudices? The effectiveness of moral credentials with in-groups versus out-groups. *The Journal of Social Psychology*, 148(6), 689-709. <https://doi.org/10.3200/SOCP.148.6.689-710>
- Kuper, N., & Bott, A. (2019). Has the evidence for moral licensing been inflated by publication bias? *Meta-Psychology*, 3. <https://doi.org/10.15626/MP.2018.878>
- Lammers, J. (2012). Abstraction increases hypocrisy. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 48(2), 475-480. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2011.07.006>
- Lammers, J., Stapel, D., & Galinsky, A. D. (2010). Power increases hypocrisy: Moralizing in reasoning, immorality in behavior. *Psychological Science*, 21(5), 737-744. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797610368810>
- Langdon, J. A., & Effron, D. A. (under review). *Lies seem less unethical when they fit the facts*.
- Laurent, S. M., & Clark, B. A. (2019). What makes hypocrisy? Folk definitions, attitude/behavior combinations, attitude strength, and private/public distinctions. *Basic and Applied Social Psychology*, 41(2), 104-121. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01973533.2018.1556160>
- Laurent, S. M., Clark, B. A. M., Walker, S., & Wiseman, K. D. (2013). Punishing hypocrisy: The roles of hypocrisy and moral emotions in deciding culpability and punishment of criminal and civil moral transgressors. *Cognition and Emotion*, 28(1), 1-25. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02699931.2013.801339>
- Leary, M. R. (1999). Making sense of self-esteem. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 8(1), 32-35. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8721.00008>
- Leroy, H., Dierynck, B., Anseel, F., Simons, T., Halbesleben, J. R., McCaughey, D., Savage, G. T., & Sels, L. (2012). Behavioral integrity for safety, priority of safety, psychological safety, and patient safety: A team-level study. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 97(6), 1273. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0030076>
- Leslie, I. (2020, April 21). The subtle reasons leaders ignore their own advice. *BBC Worklife*. <https://www.bbc.com/worklife/article/20200420-the-subtle-reasons-why-leaders-ignore-their-own-advice>
- Leventhal, A. M., Martin, R. L., Seals, R. W., Tapia, E., & Rehm, L. P. (2007). Investigating the dynamics of affect: Psychological mechanisms of affective habituation to pleasurable stimuli. *Motivation and Emotion*, 31(2), 145-157. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11031-007-9059-8>
- Levine, E. E., Roberts, A. R., & Cohen, T. R. (2020). Difficult conversations: Navigating the tension between honesty and benevolence. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 31, 38-43. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2019.07.034>
- Lewin, K. (1947). Frontiers in group dynamics II. Channels of group life; social planning and action research. *Human relations*, 1(2), 143-153.
- Lickel, B., & Onuki, M. (2015). Generalization processes in collective responsibility and intergroup conflict. In S. J. Stroessner & J. W. Sherman (Eds.), *Social perception from individuals to groups* (pp. 197-212). Psychology Press.
- Lickel, B., Schmader, T., & Hamilton, D. L. (2003). A case of collective responsibility: Who else was to blame for the Columbine High School shootings? *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 29(2), 194-204. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167202239045>

- Lin, S.-H. J., Ma, J., & Johnson, R. E. (2016). When ethical leader behavior breaks bad: How ethical leader behavior can turn abusive via ego depletion and moral licensing. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 101*(6), 815. <https://doi.org/10.1037/apl0000098>
- List, J. A., & Momeni, F. (2021). When corporate social responsibility backfires: Evidence from a natural field experiment. *Management Science, 67*(1), 8-21. <https://doi.org/10.1287/mnsc.2019.3540>
- Little, A. T. (2022). *Detecting motivated reasoning* [Unpublished working paper]. OSF Preprints. <https://osf.io/b8tvk/>
- Lynn, M. (1992). The psychology of unavailability: Explaining scarcity and cost effects on value. *Basic and Applied Social Psychology, 13*, 3-7. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15324834basp1301_2
- MacFarquhar, L. (2015). *Strangers drowning: Voyages to the brink of moral extremity*. Penguin UK.
- Mann, N. H., & Kawakami, K. (2012). The long, steep path to equality: Progressing on egalitarian goals. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General, 141*(1), 187-197. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0025602>
- Mayer, D. M., Kuenzi, M., Greenbaum, R., Bardes, M., & Salvador, R. B. (2009). How low does ethical leadership flow? Test of a trickle-down model. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes, 108*(1), 1-13. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.obhdp.2008.04.002>
- Mazar, N., Amir, O., & Ariely, D. (2008). The dishonesty of honest people: A theory of self-concept maintenance. *Journal of Marketing Research, 45*(6), 633-644. <https://doi.org/10.1509/jmkr.45.6.633>
- Mazar, N., & Zhong, C.-B. (2010). Do green products make us better people? *Psychological Science, 21*, 494-498.
- McGregor, I., Newby-Clark, I. R., & Zanna, M. P. (1999). "Remembering" dissonance: Simultaneous accessibility of inconsistent cognitive elements moderates epistemic discomfort. In E. Harmon-Jones & J. Mills (Eds.), *Cognitive dissonance: Progress on a pivotal theory in social psychology* (pp. 325-353). American Psychological Association. <https://doi.org/10.1037/10318-013>
- Mead, N. L., Baumeister, R. F., Gino, F., Schweitzer, M. E., & Ariely, D. (2009). Too tired to tell the truth: Self-control resource depletion and dishonesty. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 45*(3), 594-597. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2009.02.004>
- Merritt, A. C., Effron, D. A., Fein, S., Savitsky, K. K., Tuller, D. M., & Monin, B. (2012). The strategic pursuit of moral credentials. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 48*(3), 774-777. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2011.12.017>
- Merritt, A. C., Effron, D. A., & Monin, B. (2010). Moral self-licensing: When being good frees us to be bad. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass, 4*(5), 344-357. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1751-9004.2010.00263.x>
- Milgram, S. (1974). *Obedience to authority: An experimental view*. Harper & Row.
- Milkman, K. L., Rogers, T., & Bazerman, M. H. (2008). Harnessing our inner angels and demons: What we have learned about want/should conflicts and how that knowledge can help us reduce short-sighted decision making. *Perspectives on Psychological Science, 3*(4), 324-338. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1745-6924.2008.00083.x>
- Miller, D. T., & Effron, D. A. (2010). Psychological license: When it is needed and how it functions. In M. P. Zanna & J. M. Olson (Eds.), *Advances in experimental social psychology* (Vol. 43, pp. 117-158). Academic Press/Elsevier. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0065-2601\(10\)43003-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0065-2601(10)43003-8)
- Miller, D. T., Effron, D. A., & Zak, S. V. (2009). From moral outrage to social protest: The role of psychological standing. In A. C. Kay, D. R. Bobocel, M. P. Zanna, & J. M. Olson (Eds.), *The psychology of justice and legitimacy: The Ontario symposium* (Vol. 11, pp. 103-123). Psychological Press.
- Miller, D. T., & McFarland, C. (1986). Counterfactual thinking and victim compensation: A test of norm theory. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 12*(4), 513-519. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167286124014>
- Miller, M., Hepburn, L., & Azrael, D. (2017). Firearm acquisition without background checks. *Annals of Internal Medicine, 166*(4), 233-239. <https://doi.org/10.7326/M16-1590>
- Minson, J. A., & Monin, B. (2012). Do-gooder derogation: Disparaging morally-motivated minorities to defuse anticipated reproach. *Social Psychological and Personality Science, 3*(2), 200-207.
- Monin, B., & Jordan, A. H. (2009). The dynamic moral self: A social psychological perspective. In D. Narvaez & D. Lapsley (Eds.), *Moral self, identity, and character: Prospects for a new field of study* (pp. 341-354). Cambridge University Press.
- Monin, B., & Merritt, A. C. (2012). Moral hypocrisy, moral inconsistency, and the struggle for moral integrity. In M. Mikulincer & P. Shaver (Eds.), *The social psychology of morality: Exploring the causes of good and evil* (pp. 167-202). American Psychological Association.
- Monin, B., & Miller, D. T. (2001). Moral credentials and the expression of prejudice. *Journal of personality and social psychology, 81*(1), 33-43. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.81.1.33>

- Monin, B., Sawyer, P. J., & Marquez, M. J. (2008). The rejection of moral rebels: Resenting those who do the right thing. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 95(1), 76-93. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.95.1.76>
- Moore, C., & Gino, F. (2013). Ethically adrift: How others pull our moral compass from true north, and how we can fix it. *Research in Organizational Behavior*, 33(53-77), 53-77. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.riob.2013.08.001>
- Mueller, A. B., & Skitka, L. J. (2018). Liars, damned liars, and zealots: The effect of moral mandates on transgressive advocacy acceptance. *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, 9(6), 711-718 <https://doi.org/10.1177/1948550617720272>
- Mullen, E., & Monin, B. (2016). Consistency versus licensing effects of past moral behavior. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 67, 363-385. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-psych-010213-115120>
- Newman, B., Merolla, J. L., Shah, S., Lemi, D. C., Collingwood, L., & Ramakrishnan, S. K. (2021). The Trump effect: An experimental investigation of the emboldening effect of racially inflammatory elite communication. *British Journal of Political Science*, 51(3), 1138-1159. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123419000590>
- Newman, E. J., Garry, M., Bernstein, D. M., Kantner, J., & Lindsay, D. S. (2012). Nonprobative photographs (or words) inflate truthiness. *Psychonomic Bulletin and Review*, 19(5), 969-974. <https://doi.org/10.3758/s13423-012-0292-0>
- Nisan, M. (1991). The moral balance model: Theory and research extending our understanding of moral choice and deviation. In W. M. Kurtines & J. L. Gewirtz (Eds.), *Handbook of moral behavior and development* (pp. 213-249). Erlbaum.
- Nordgren, L. F., & McDonnell, M.-H. M. (2011). The scope-severity paradox: Why doing more harm is judged to be less harmful. *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, 2(1), 97-102. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1948550610382308>
- O'Connor, K., Effron, D. A., & Lucas, B. J. (2020). Moral cleansing as hypocrisy: When private acts of charity make you feel better than you deserve. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 119(3), 540-559. <https://doi.org/10.1037/pspa0000195>
- O'Connor, K., & Monin, B. (2016). When principled deviance becomes moral threat: Testing alternative mechanisms for the rejection of moral rebels. *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations*, 19(5), 676-693.
- Osgood, C. E., & Tannenbaum, P. H. (1955). The principle of congruity in the prediction of attitude change. *Psychological Review*, 62(1), 42-55. <https://doi.org/10.1037/h0048153>
- Parloff, R. (2014). Theranos' Elizabeth Holmes: young entrepreneurs need "a mission". *Fortune*. <https://fortune.com/2014/12/03/theranos-elizabeth-holmes-young-fortune-mpw-next-gen/>
- Paz, C. (2020, November 2). All the president's lies about the coronavirus. *The Atlantic*. <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2020/11/trumps-lies-about-coronavirus/608647/>
- Pennycook, G., Cannon, T., & Rand, D. G. (2018). Prior exposure increases perceived accuracy of fake news. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General*, 147(12), 1865-1880. <https://doi.org/10.1037/xge0000465>
- Pillai, R., Fazio, L. K., & Effron, D. A. (in preparation). *How repetition affects moral judgments in naturalistic settings*.
- Pillai, R. M., & Fazio, L. K. (2021). The effects of repeating false and misleading information on belief. *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Cognitive Science*, 12(6), e1573. <https://doi.org/doi.org/10.1002/wcs.1573>
- Polman, E., Effron, D. A., & Thomas, M. R. (2018). Other People's money: Money's perceived purchasing power is smaller for others than for the self. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 45(1), 109-125. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jcr/ucx119>
- Polman, E., Pettit, N. C., & Wiesenfeld, B. M. (2013). Effects of wrongdoer status on moral licensing. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 49(4), 614-623. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2013.03.012>
- Powell, C. A. J., & Smith, R. H. (2012). Schadenfreude caused by the exposure of hypocrisy in others. *Self and Identity*, 12(4), 1-19. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15298868.2012.687013>
- Prinsen, S., Evers, C., & de Ridder, D. T. (2019). Justified indulgence: self-licensing effects on caloric consumption. *Psychology & Health*, 34(1), 24-43. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08870446.2018.1508683>
- Prosser, A. M., Judge, M., Bolderdijk, J. W., Blackwood, L., & Kurz, T. (2020). 'Distancers' and 'non-distancers'? The potential social psychological impact of moralizing COVID-19 mitigating practices on sustained behaviour change. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 59(3), 653-662. <https://doi.org/10.1111/bjso.12399>
- Pyszczynski, T., Greenberg, J., Solomon, S., Arndt, J., & Schimel, J. (2004). Why do people need self-esteem? A theoretical and empirical review. *Psychological Bulletin*, 130(3), 435-468.
- Reed, A., II, Aquino, K., & Levy, E. (2007). Moral identity and judgments of charitable behaviors. *Journal of Marketing*, 71(1), 178-193. <https://doi.org/10.2307/30162137>

- Rossoll, N. (2017, January 25). Conway: Crowd size at Trump's inauguration 'was historic,' considering projections and rain. *ABC News*. <http://abcnews.go.com/ThisWeek/crowd-size-trumps-inauguration-historic-projections-rain/story?id=44968944>
- Rotella, A., & Barclay, P. (2020). Failure to replicate moral licensing and moral cleansing in an online experiment. *Personality and Individual Differences*, *161*, 109967, Article 109967. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2020.109967>
- Rozin, P. (1999). The process of moralization. *Psychological Science*, *10*(3), 218-221. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9280.00139>
- Rozin, P., & Singh, L. (1999). The moralization of cigarette smoking in the United States. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, *8*(3), 339-339.
- Sachdeva, S., Iliev, R., & Medin, D. L. (2009). Sinning saints and saintly sinners: The paradox of moral self-regulation. *Psychological Science*, *20*(4), 523-528. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9280.2009.02326.x>
- Sah, S., & Loewenstein, G. (2014). Nothing to declare: Mandatory and voluntary disclosure leads advisors to avoid conflicts of interest. *Psychological Science*, *25*(2), 575-584. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797613511824>
- Schier, U. K., Ockenfels, A., & Hofmann, W. (2016). Moral values and increasing stakes in a dictator game. *Journal of Economic Psychology*, *56*, 107-115. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.joep.2016.06.004>
- Schwabe, M., Dose, D. B., & Walsh, G. (2018). Every saint has a past, and every sinner has a future: Influences of regulatory focus on consumers' moral self-regulation. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, *28*(2), 234-252. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jcpy.1025>
- Sedikides, C., Gaertner, L., & Toguchi, Y. (2003). Pancultural self-enhancement. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *84*-79(1), 60. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/12518971>
- Sedikides, C., & Strube, M. J. (1997). Self-evaluation: To thine own self be good, to thine own self be sure, to thine own self be true, and to thine own self be better. In M. P. Zanna (Ed.), *Advances in experimental social psychology* (Vol. 29, pp. 209-269). Elsevier. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0065-2601\(08\)60018-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0065-2601(08)60018-0)
- Shalvi, S., Dana, J., Handgraaf, M. J. J., & De Dreu, C. K. W. (2011). Justified ethicality: Observing desired counterfactuals modifies ethical perceptions and behavior. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, *115*(2), 181-190. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.obhdp.2011.02.001>
- Shalvi, S., Gino, F., Barkan, R., & Ayal, S. (2015). Self-serving justifications: Doing wrong and feeling moral. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, *24*(2), 125-130. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0963721414553264>
- Shidlovski, D., Schul, Y., & Mayo, R. (2014). If I imagine it, then it happened: The implicit truth value of imaginary representations. *Cognition*, *133*(3), 517-529. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cognition.2014.08.005>
- Simbrunner, P., & Schlegelmilch, B. B. (2017). Moral licensing: A culture-moderated meta-analysis. *Management Review Quarterly*, *67*(4), 201-225. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11301-017-0128-0>
- Simon, L., Greenberg, J., & Brehm, J. (1995). Trivialization: the forgotten mode of dissonance reduction. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, *68*(2), 247-260.
- Simons, T. (2002). Behavioral integrity: The perceived alignment between managers' words and deeds as a research focus. *Organization Science*, *13*(1), 18-35. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3086064>
- Simons, T., Friedman, R., Liu, L. A., & McLean Parks, J. (2007). Racial differences in sensitivity to behavioral integrity: Attitudinal consequences, in-group effects, and "trickle down" among Black and non-Black employees. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *92*(3), 650-665. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.92.3.650>
- Simons, T., Leroy, H., Collewaert, V., & Masschelein, S. (2014). How leader alignment of words and deeds affects followers: A meta-analysis of behavioral integrity research. *Journal of Business Ethics*, *132*(4), 831-884. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-014-2332-3>
- Simonsohn, U. (2014, March 12). No-way interactions. *Data Colada*. <http://datacolada.org/17>
- Sjöström, A., & Gollwitzer, M. (2015). Displaced revenge: Can revenge taste "sweet" if it aims at a different target? *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, *56*, 191-202. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2014.09.016>
- Skitka, L. J., Bauman, C. W., & Sargis, E. G. (2005). Moral conviction: Another contributor to attitude strength or something more? *Journal of personality and social psychology*, *88*(6), 895-917. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.88.6.895>
- Slovic, P. (2007). "If I look at the mass I will never act": Psychic numbing and genocide. *Judgment and Decision Making*, *2*, 29-85.
- Small, D. A., Loewenstein, G., & Slovic, P. (2007). Sympathy and callousness: The impact of deliberative thought on donations to identifiable and statistical victims. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, *102*(2), 143-153. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.obhdp.2006.01.005>
- Sniezek, J. A., Schrah, G. E., & Dalal, R. S. (2004). Improving judgement with prepaid expert advice. *Journal of Behavioral Decision Making*, *17*(3), 173-190. <https://doi.org/10.1002/bdm.468>

- Snyder, M., & Swann, W. B. (1978). Hypothesis-testing processes in social interaction. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 36(11), 1202-1212. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.36.11.1202>
- Soll, J. B., & Larrick, R. P. (2009). Strategies for revising judgment: How (and how well) people use others' opinions. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Learning, Memory, and Cognition*, 35(3), 780-805. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0015145>
- Stearns, D. C., & Parrott, W. G. (2012). When feeling bad makes you look good: Guilt, shame, and person perception. *Cognition & Emotion*, 26(3), 407-430. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02699931.2012.675879>
- Steele, C. M. (1988). The psychology of self-affirmation: Sustaining the integrity of the self. In L. Berkowitz (Ed.), *Advances in experimental social psychology* (Vol. 21, pp. 261-302). Academic Press.
- Stenstrom, D. M., Lickel, B., Denson, T. F., & Miller, N. (2008). The roles of ingroup identification and outgroup entitativity in intergroup retribution. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 34(11), 1570-1582. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167208322999>
- Stone, J., Aronson, E., Crain, A. L., Winslow, M. P., & Fried, C. B. (1994). Inducing hypocrisy as a means of encouraging young adults to use condoms. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 20(1), 116-128. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167294201012>
- Stone, J., & Fernandez, N. C. (2008). To practice what we preach: The use of hypocrisy and cognitive dissonance to motivate behavior change. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, 2(2), 1024-1051. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1751-9004.2008.00088.x>
- Stosic, M. D., Helwig, S., & Ruben, M. A. (2021). Greater belief in science predicts mask-wearing behavior during COVID-19. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 176, 110769. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2021.110769>
- Strohminger, N., Lewis, R. L., & Meyer, D. E. (2011). Divergent effects of different positive emotions on moral judgment. *Cognition*, 119(2), 295-300. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cognition.2010.12.012>
- Strohminger, N., & Nichols, S. (2014). The essential moral self. *Cognition*, 131(1), 159-171. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cognition.2013.12.005>
- Susewind, M., & Hoelzl, E. (2014). A matter of perspective: Why past moral behavior can sometimes encourage and other times discourage future moral striving. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 44(3), 201-209. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jasp.12214>
- Swim, J. K., Aikin, K. J., Hall, W. S., & Hunter, B. A. (1995). Sexism and racism: Old-fashioned and modern prejudices. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 68(2), 199-214. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.68.2.199>
- Szabados, B., & Soifer, E. (2004). *Hypocrisy: Ethical investigations*. Broadview Press.
- Tang, P. M., Yam, K. C., Koopman, J., & Ilies, R. (2022). Admired and disgusted? Third parties' paradoxical emotional reactions and behavioral consequences towards others' unethical pro-organizational behavior. *Personnel Psychology*, 75(1), 33-67. <https://doi.org/10.1111/peps.12446>
- Tankard, M. E., & Paluck, E. L. (2017). The effect of a Supreme Court decision regarding gay marriage on social norms and personal attitudes. *Psychological Science*, 28(9), 1334-1344. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797617709594>
- Tappin, B. M., Pennycook, G., & Rand, D. G. (2020a). Bayesian or biased? Analytic thinking and political belief updating. *Cognition*, 204, 1-12. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cognition.2020.104375>
- Tappin, B. M., Pennycook, G., & Rand, D. G. (2020b). Thinking clearly about causal inferences of politically motivated reasoning: why paradigmatic study designs often undermine causal inference. *Current Opinion in Behavioral Sciences*, 34, 81-87. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cobeha.2020.01.003>
- Tarrant, M., Branscombe, N. R., Warner, R. H., & Weston, D. (2012). Social identity and perceptions of torture: It's moral when we do it. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 48(2), 513-518. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2011.10.017>
- Tedeschi, J. T., Schlenker, B. R., & Bonoma, T. V. (1971). Cognitive dissonance: Private ratiocination or public spectacle? *American Psychologist*, 26(8), 685-695. <https://doi.org/10.1037/h0032110>
- Tenbrunsel, A. E., Diekmann, K. A., Wade-Benzoni, K. A., & Bazerman, M. H. (2010). The ethical mirage: A temporal explanation as to why we are not as ethical as we think we are. *Research in Organizational Behavior*, 30, 153-173. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.riob.2010.08.004>
- Tenbrunsel, A. E., & Messick, D. M. (2004). Ethical fading: The role of self-deception in unethical behavior. *Social Justice Research*, 17(2), 223-236. <https://doi.org/10.1023/B:SORE.0000027411.35832.53>
- Tetlock, P. E. (1998). Close-call counterfactuals and belief-system defenses: I was not almost wrong but I was almost right. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 75(3), 639-652. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.75.3.639>

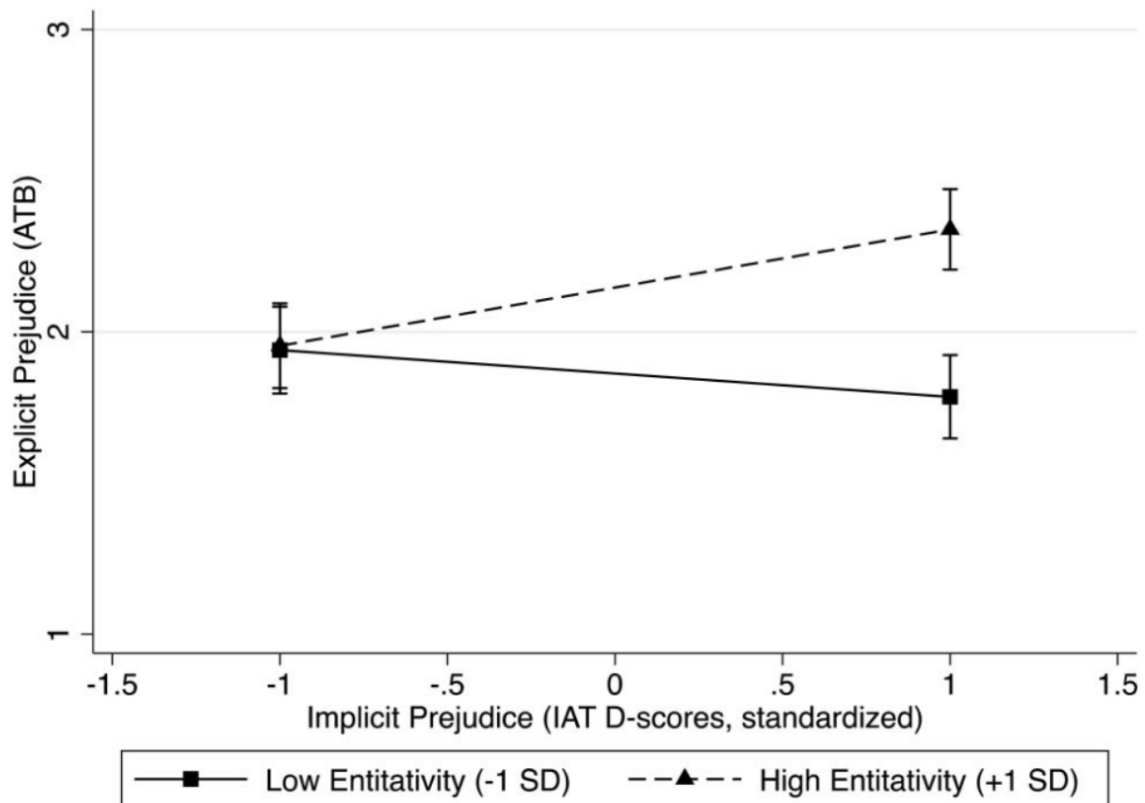
- Tetlock, P. E., & Henik, E. (2005). Theory- versus imagination-driven thinking about historical counterfactuals: Are we prisoners of our preconceptions? In D. R. Mandel, D. J. Hilton, & P. Catellani (Eds.), *The psychology of counterfactual thinking* (pp. 199-216). Routledge.
- Tetlock, P. E., & Levi, A. (1982). Attribution bias: On the inconclusiveness of the cognition-motivation debate. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 18(1), 68-88. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0022-1031\(82\)90082-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/0022-1031(82)90082-8)
- Tetlock, P. E., & Visser, P. S. (2000). Thinking about Russia: Plausible pasts and probable futures. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 39(2), 173-196. <https://doi.org/10.1348/014466600164417>
- Thai, M., Hornsey, M. J., & Barlow, F. K. (2016). Friends with moral credentials: Minority friendships reduce attributions of racism for majority group members who make conceivably racist statements. *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, 7(3), 272-280. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1948550615624140>
- The New York Times. (2022). Night after night, the host of the most-watched show in prime-time cable news uses a simple narrative to instill fear in his viewers: “they” want ot control and then destroy “you”. <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2022/04/30/us/tucker-carlson-tonight.html>
- Treviño, L. K., & Brown, M. E. (2005). The role of leaders in influencing unethical behavior in the workplace. In C. L. Martin & R. E. Kidwell (Eds.), *Managing organizational deviance* (pp. 69-87). Sage.
- Trope, Y., & Liberman, A. (1996). Social hypothesis testing: Cognitive and motivational mechanisms. In E. T. Higgins & A. W. Kruglanski (Eds.), *Social psychology: Handbook of basic principles* (pp. 239-270). Guilford.
- Turiel, E. (1977). Distinct conceptual and developmental domains: Social convention and morality. *Nebraska Symposium on Motivation*, 25, 77-116. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/753994>
- Valdesolo, P., & DeSteno, D. (2007). Moral hypocrisy: Social groups and the flexibility of virtue. *Psychological Science*, 18(8), 689-689. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9280.2007.01961.x>
- Valdesolo, P., & DeSteno, D. (2008). The duality of virtue: Deconstructing the moral hypocrite. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 44(5), 1334-1334. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2008.03.010>
- van de Ven, N., Blanken, I., & Zeelenberg, M. (2018). Temptation-based reasoning: when tempted, everything becomes a (better) reason to indulge. *Journal of Marketing Behavior*, 3(3), 185-209. <https://doi.org/10.1561/107.00000047>
- Van Zee, A. (2009). The promotion and marketing of Oxycontin: Commercial triumph, public health tragedy. *American Journal of Public Health*, 99(2), 221-227. <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2007.131714>
- Verma, R., Vinoda, K. S., Papireddy, M., & Gowda, A. N. S. (2016). Toxic pollutants from plastic waste – A review. *Procedia Environmental Sciences*, 35, 701-708. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.proenv.2016.07.069>
- Voci, A. (2006). Relevance of social categories, depersonalization and group processes: Two field tests of self-categorization theory. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 36(1), 73-90. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ejsp.259>
- Wagner, T., Lutz, R. J., & Weitz, B. A. (2009). Corporate hypocrisy: Overcoming the threat of inconsistent corporate social responsibility perceptions. *Journal of Marketing*, 73(6), 77-91. <https://doi.org/10.1509/jmkg.73.6.77>
- Watkins, H. M., & Goodwin, G. P. (2020). A fundamental asymmetry in judgments of soldiers at war. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General*, 149(3), 419-444. <https://doi.org/10.1037/xge0000666>
- Watters, J. B. (2020). *What would the media say if Barack Obama were president during the Coronavirus Pandemic and handled it the same way as @realDonaldTrump? WATCH #TheFive* [Twitter Post]. <https://twitter.com/JesseBWatters/status/1257430049147379712>
- Waytz, A., Dungan, J., & Young, L. (2013). The whistleblower's dilemma and the fairness–loyalty tradeoff. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 49(6), 1027-1033. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2013.07.002>
- Welsh, D. T., Ordóñez, L. D., Snyder, D. G., & Christian, M. S. (2015). The slippery slope: How small ethical transgressions pave the way for larger future transgressions. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 100(1), 114-127. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0036950>
- White, J. A., & Plous, S. (1995). Self-enhancement and social responsibility: On caring more, but doing less, than others. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 25(15), 1297-1318. <https://doi.org/DOI.10.1111/j.1559-1816.1995.tb02619.x>
- Wilcox, K., Kramer, T., & Sen, S. (2011). Indulgence or self-control: A dual process model of the effect of incidental pride on indulgent choice. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 38(1), 151-163. <https://doi.org/10.1086/657606>
- Wilson, T. D., & Gilbert, D. T. (2008). Explaining away: A model of affective adaptation. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 3(5), 370-386. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1745-6924.2008.00085.x>

- Willemuth, S. S. (2011). Cheating more when the spoils are split. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 115(2), 157-168. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.obhdp.2010.10.001>
- Worchel, S., Lee, J., & Adewole, A. (1975). Effects of supply and demand on ratings of object value. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 32(5), 906-914. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.32.5.906>
- Yam, K. C., Klotz, A. C., He, W., & Reynolds, S. J. (2017). From good soldiers to psychologically entitled: Examining when and why citizenship behavior leads to deviance. *Academy of Management Journal*, 60(1), 373-396. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2014.0234>
- Yam, K. C., Reynolds, S. J., & Hirsh, J. B. (2014). The hungry thief: Physiological deprivation and its effects on unethical behavior. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 125(2), 123-133. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.obhdp.2014.07.002>
- Yan, Y., Malik, A. A., Bayham, J., Fenichel, E. P., Couzens, C., & Omer, S. B. (2021). Measuring voluntary and policy-induced social distancing behavior during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 118(16), e2008814118. <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2008814118>
- Yaniv, I., & Kleinberger, E. (2000). Advice taking in decision making: Egocentric discounting and reputation formation. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 83(2), 260-281. <https://doi.org/10.1006/obhd.2000.2909>
- Zitek, E. M., Jordan, A. H., Monin, B., & Leach, F. R. (2010). Victim entitlement to behave selfishly. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 98(2), 245-255. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0017168>

Figures

Figure 1

Relationship Between Implicit and Explicit Prejudice as a Function of Perceived Ingroup Entitativity in Effron & Knowles (2015), Study 5

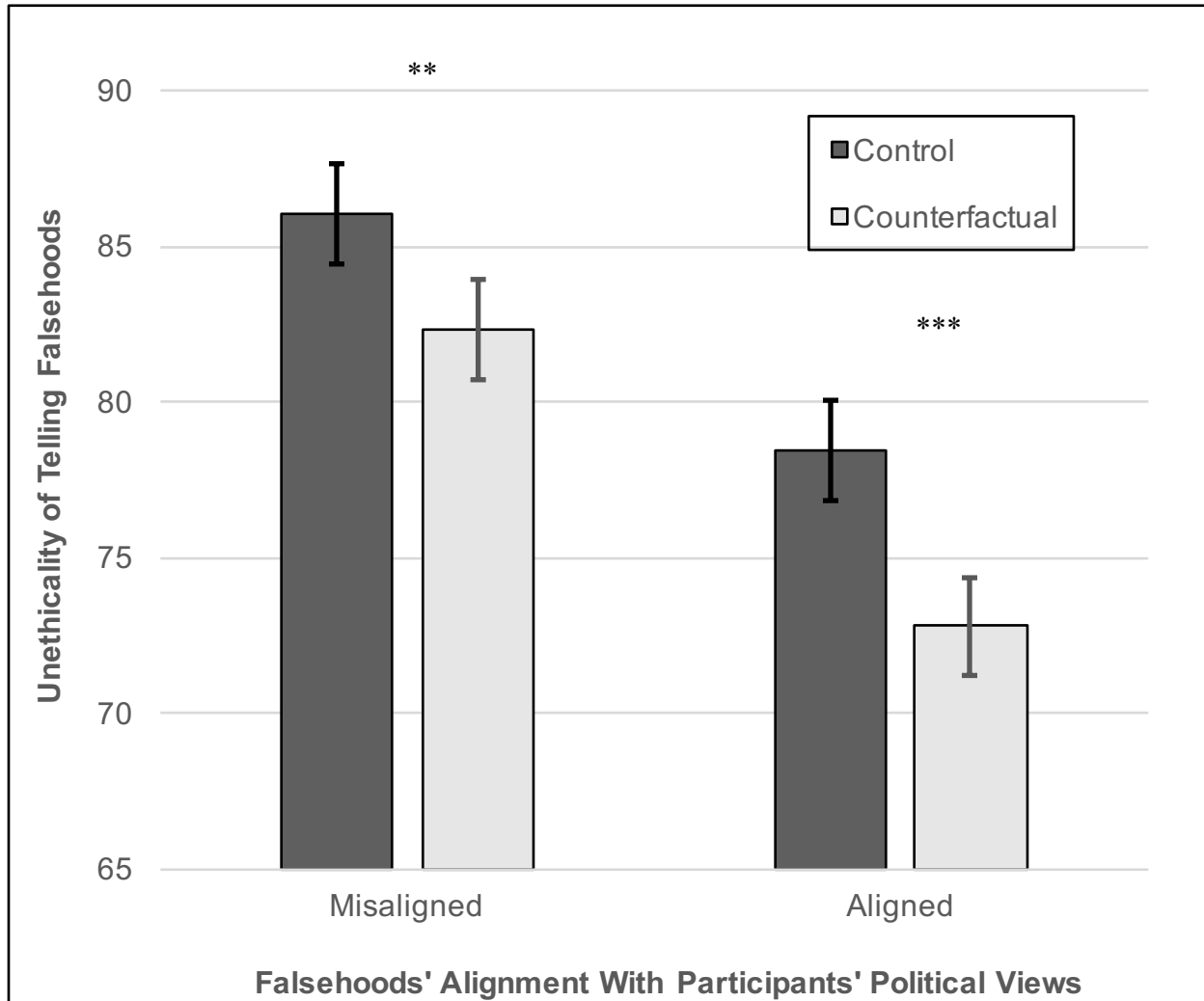


Note. The *y*-axis shows scores on the Attitudes Towards Blacks (ATB) scale (Brigham, 1993).

Response options could range from 1–7, with higher numbers indicating more anti-Black prejudice. The *x*-axis shows scores on the Implicit Association Test (IAT; Greenwald et al., 1998), where higher numbers indicate stronger implicit associations between Black (vs. White) people and negative (vs. positive) words.

Figure 2

Mean unethality rating, by condition and alignment with participants' politics, $\pm 95\%$ CI, in Effron (2018) Study 1.

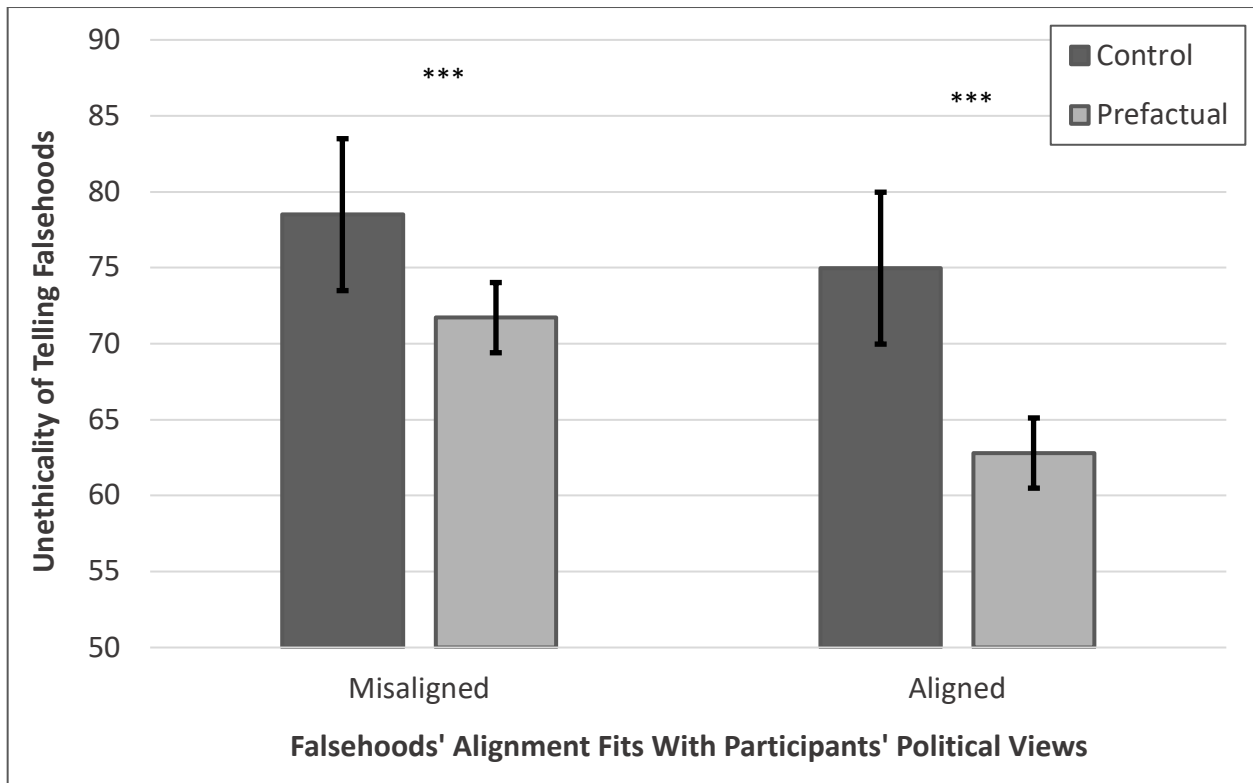


Note. In this study, participants in the counterfactual condition imagined how the falsehoods “could have been true” whereas participants in the control condition did not. Means and 95% CIs were computed from a mixed regression analysis. Full scale of unethality ratings is 0 to 100.

*** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$.

Figure 3

Mean unethicity rating, by condition and alignment with participants' politics, $\pm 95\%$ CI, adapted from Helgason & Effron (in press) Study 3.



Note. In this study, participants in the prefactual condition imagined how the falsehoods “might become true” whereas participants in the control condition did not. Plotted values are the estimated marginal means and their 95% confidence intervals from a mixed regression model. Full scale of unethicity ratings is 0-100. *** $p < .001$.

Figure 4

Stronger Relationship Between Counterfactual Closeness and Blame When Participants Judged a President They Opposed vs. Supported. Reproduced from Epstude et al. (in press).

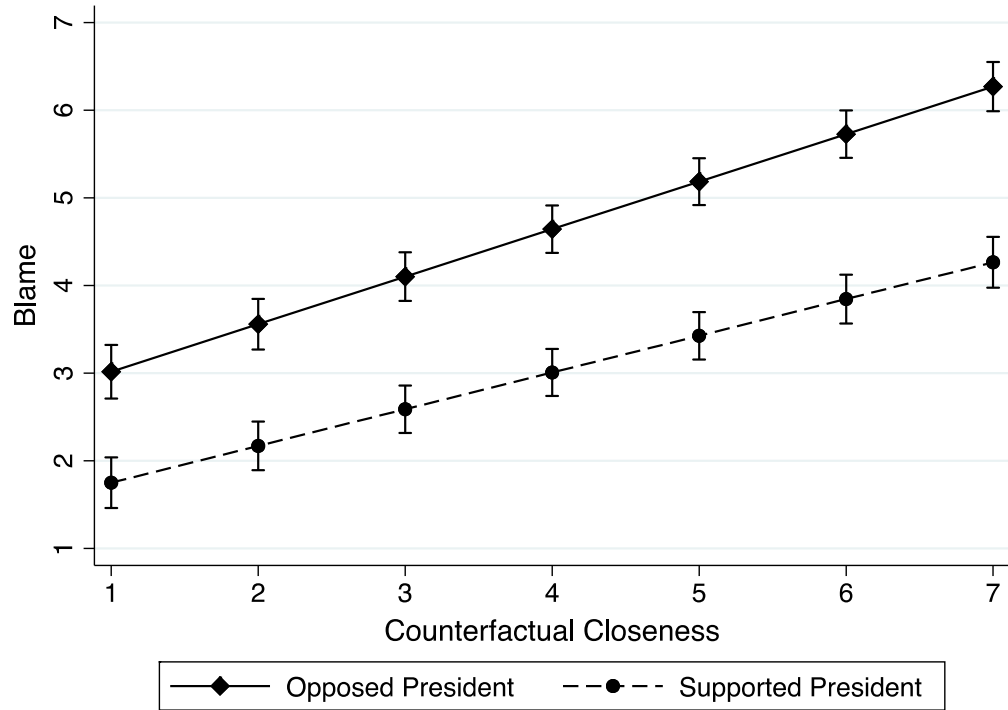
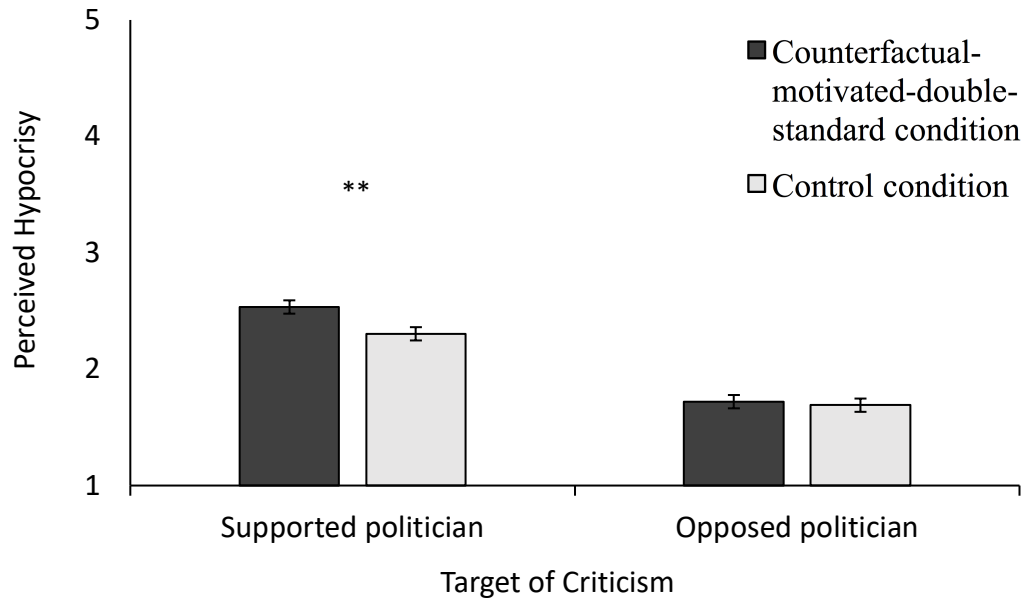


Figure 5

Mean Hypocrisy Ratings by Condition and Target of Criticism, Adapted from Helgason & Effron (2022), Study 2b.

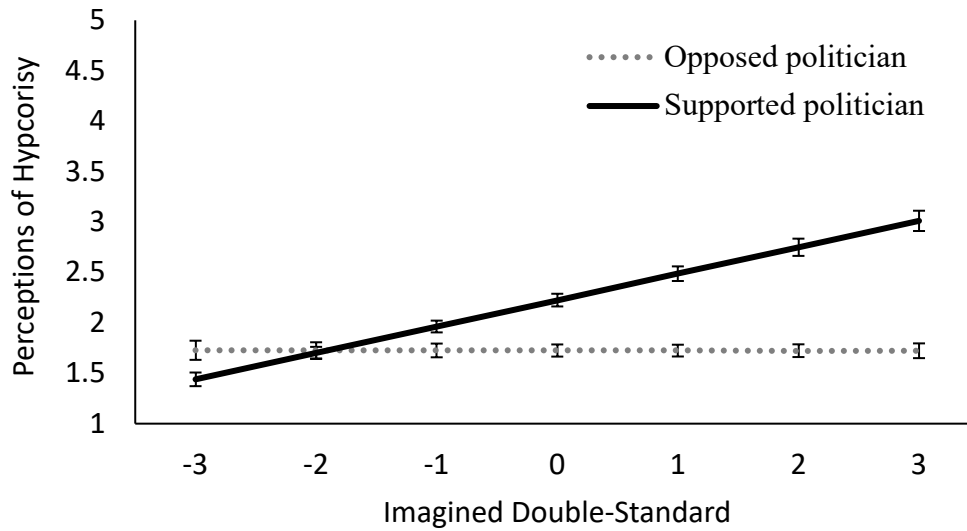


Note. The graph plots estimated marginal means and their standard errors from the mixed regression model described in the main text. Error bars indicate standard errors. Full scale of hypocrisy ratings is 1-5.

Figure 5

Perceived Hypocrisy by Imagined Double-Standard. Adapted from Helgason & Effron (2022),

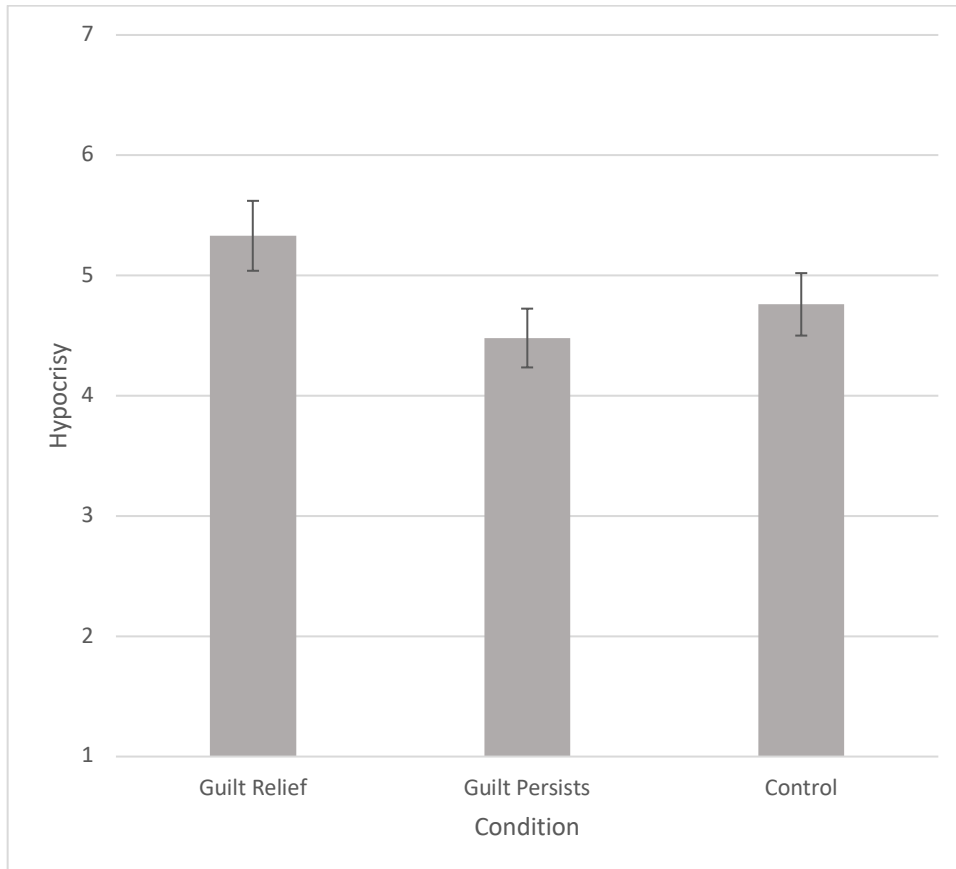
Study 2b.



Note. The graph plots estimated marginal means and their standard errors from a mixed regression model. More-positive numbers on the x -axis indicate a stronger belief that the media commentator would have shown a double-standard against the criticized politician. Full scale of hypocrisy ratings is 1-5.

Figure 6

Mean hypocrisy ratings, $\pm SE$, in each experimental condition of O'Connor et al. (2020), Study 5.



Note. The means shown in the figure are from Table 3 in O'Connor et al. (2020). The *SEs* were computed from the *SDs* shown in that table, assuming an equal number of participants in each condition. Hypocrisy ratings could range from 1 to 7.