

2006). *Psychoanalytic Psychology*, 23:475-489

Immoral Actions in Otherwise Moral Individuals: Interrogating the Structure and Meaning of Moral Hypocrisy

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Not all forms of deception are alike. Unlike pathological lying or frank antisocial behavior, moral hypocrisy reflects the deceptive pursuit of self-interest in which the individual uniquely violates his or her own moral standards. Four hypotheses relevant to this concept are identified in a critical review of the psychoanalytic literature. These hypotheses are evaluated logically and in light of findings from contemporary research. The author argues that explanations resting on the concepts of superego weakness, impulse strength, and/or narcissism fail to provide an adequate account of the complex intentions betokened by hypocrisy. By contrast, the mechanism of disavowal enjoys strong, broad-based support once it is freed from the narrow confines of perception and reality testing. Rather than an attenuation of reality testing, hypocrisy represents a mode of perception in which contradictory moral imperatives coexist without conflict. Authentic engagement and empathy with patients is facilitated by a nonjudgmental appreciation of the human capacity for moral disengagement.

Like perversions, hypocrisy involves actions that curiously escape internal censorship and reflect the deceptive pursuit of interests about which the neurotic dares only fantasize. Incompatible with his theory of repression, Freud (1926/1940) employed the term disavowal to characterize the warding off of traumatic perceptions that occurs in these phenomena. Unlike defenses that disguise unconscious wishes, disavowal denies the truth of something external to and independent of the subject and, for this reason, is an ineffective compromise easily disconfirmed by experience. Therefore, Freud reasons, conflict is avoided only by a splitting of the ego in which two contradictory and independent attitudes "...persist side by side...without influencing each other" (1940, p. 203). Whereas disavowal subsumes splitting of the ego in contemporary usage, neither

term implies compromised reality testing or a relative failure of integration or differentiation among representations of the same object. Rather, they denote instances in which the subject consciously holds two attitudes toward the same perception.

Two lines of psychoanalytic thinking are relevant to moral hypocrisy, which is defined as the effort to appear morally better through deceptive actions that violate one's own moral standards. The first is Rangell's (1974) syndrome of compromise of integrity, which formulates moral lapses as conflicts between the ego and superego in which the impact of the latter is weakened or overpowered by ego interests. He explicitly links hypocrisy to repression, narcissism, and superego weakness in an effort to locate this phenomenon within Freud's structural model. The second perspective is found in the work of Renik (1992) and Grossman (1993) who radicalized Arlow's (1971) concept of character perversion from a defense against perverse tendencies to a mode of perception that attenuates reality. Moral lapses represent an enactment of fantasy without an adequate evaluation of its consequences.

These ideas are distilled into four hypotheses that are evaluated logically and in light of empirical findings on moral hypocrisy. Based on this analysis, I argue that the concept of disavowal enjoys broad-based support, both clinically and empirically, as an important mechanism operating in moral hypocrisy. However, this support requires severing any intrinsic link between disavowal and specific etiologies or reality testing. By contrast, hypotheses attributing moral hypocrisy to narcissism, superego weakness, and/or the overpowering impact of impulses are not supported. Specifically, they explain neither the hypocrite's deceptive pursuit of self-interest and moral posturing nor the coexistence of dissimulation with internalized values. Recognizing this dual structure illuminates a variety of phenomena falling under the rubric of moral lapses that are distinct from antisocial behavior.

What Is Moral Hypocrisy?

John is a 43-year-old businessman who enters treatment at the urging of his wife, Liz, who is troubled by his lack of sexual desire. The son of immigrant parents, John was raised in a working class neighborhood in the Bronx and graduated from a public university before making his way into the business world. Personable, although somewhat formal, John exudes confidence and calm. He describes long-standing interests that include collecting fine art, wine, and rare coins. Over the years, he has held leadership roles in several charitable organizations and enjoys a reputation for being honorable, scrupulous, and easy to work with. John has come a long way from his humble beginnings.

However, John keeps his roots as well as his inner life hidden. He shows little affinity for others except when their interests coincide with his own. Liz senses his detachment, but is inured to it by virtue of her own emotionally stilted New England upbringing. John often quotes his wife reassuringly as saying to him: "Johnny, I know you're not doing this out of ill-will." He recognizes that her perception of him as well-intentioned is of vital importance to her, yet he invests little emotionally into the relationship beyond generic "good"-will. He enjoys the meals Liz dutifully prepares and serves each evening, but nevertheless immediately busies himself with his affairs while she retires to her room to read. They rarely make love and, because they do so only outside of the family home, Liz literally must make the arrangements weeks in advance.

Circumstances change when Liz discovers his misappropriation of their daughter's trust fund. Despite her ensuing depression, he shows remarkably little concern about his

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actions. "I never gamble more money (in the stock market) than I can afford to lose." He defends his actions on the basis of his intention to increase the fund's value, without acknowledging the emotional impact of his betrayal. This is all the more significant because, although John takes great pride in the myriad symbols of his success, it turns out that this fund is not legally under his control. He has accumulated surprisingly little wealth of his own; whatever "success" he enjoys is attributable directly to his wife's inheritance. On his own, John has had a rather modest career. Only as the focus of the treatment shifts increasingly to these incongruities and their meaning does John confide his current involvement in an extramarital affair spanning the last 10 years. Although the trysts are infrequent, they are passionate and intense.

The disparities in John's life are striking. He lives a gentrified life that is not at all of his own making. He enters treatment to mollify his wife without any intention of forsaking his secret life. He comports himself like a person of integrity while gambling away his daughter's money. He inspires others' trust only to betray it by his deceptive actions. Yet he attributes these problems alternately to circumstances beyond his control or lapses in judgment. Since the consequences are unintended, he does not quite grasp their moral import. Why "upset" his wife with the details of his actions when they are remediable without her knowledge. Whatever initial sense of conflict and shame he feels soon disappears. It is difficult to reconcile the ego-syntonicity of these transgressions with his otherwise moral demeanor.

In its broadest sense, hypocrisy denotes insincerity or pretense among thoughts, beliefs, values, and actions. It reflects any behavior in which one does not practice what one preaches. However, moral hypocrisy has a more restricted meaning. Specifically, it represents “a motive to appear moral in one's own and others' eyes, while, if possible, avoiding the cost of actually being moral” (Batson, Thompson, Seufferling, Whitney, & Strongman, 1999, p. 525). Behaving in a way that appears consistent with, but in fact is contrary to one's own moral standards is the sine qua non of this phenomenon.

Moral hypocrisy may be distinguished from three important concepts: integrity, antihypocrisy, and antisocial personality. Integrity stands in opposition to hypocrisy. It implies consistency among diverse beliefs, values, and actions. The person of integrity resists corruption not simply by holding fast to his or her values under any circumstances, but by continually reshaping, refining, and adapting them to meet life's challenges. Because the guidance of conscience can be variable and contradictory, integrity allows one to meet situations of conflict and ambiguity with a sense of conviction and steadiness. Fundamentally, integrity “...permits a greater toleration of tension and of diversity” (Erikson, 1968, p. 81).

Like the person of integrity, the antihypocrite (Grant, 1997) also resists corruption, but accomplishes this by an intolerance of moral ambiguity and relativism. If the hypocrite's morality is mercurial and driven by self-interest, the antihypocrite's is fixed and uncompromising. The latter places his or her own moral purity above all other considerations and, as such, is ill-suited to fashioning solutions for conflicts containing legitimate, but competing, interests. In family as well as in public life, competing interests are the norm, and rigidity of judgment thwarts effective compromise and resolution. Great harm can be done under the guise of moral certitude.

Importantly, the person of integrity and the antihypocrite share a belief in and commitment to a normative value system. Although differing in the degree to which moral principles may be adapted to the unique reality of a particular situation, both stances are inconsistent with corruption. It is precisely this characteristic of incorruptibility that is missing in the antisocial personality. Not only do such individuals behave dishonestly, but

they also lack a sincere commitment to normative moral standards (Kernberg, 1984). Moral standards are recognized but are exploited for selfish, often criminal, purposes.

Compromises of Integrity

Historically, psychoanalysts have shown greater interest in the vicissitudes of excessive rather than inadequate morality. Notable exceptions include investigations of lying (Brunswick, 1943; Deutsch, 1981; Kernberg, 1984; O'Shaughnessy, 1990) and imposture (Deutsch, 1955; Greenacre, 1958) but nevertheless have been limited exclusively to patients exhibiting symptoms of psychopathy, narcissistic personality disorder, or borderline personality organization. The uniqueness of Rangell's (1974) syndrome of compromise of integrity is its orthogonality to personality organization and character type. Distinct from instances of conscious lying and overt criminal behavior, compromises of integrity reflect conflicts between the ego and a weakened superego whereas psychopathy entails the latter's corruption and pathological compromise. He views the superego as malleable by virtue of its lifelong contact with and openness to the external world (Rangell, 1980). This is consistent with Arlow's (1982) view of the superego as being composed of multiple, conflicting identifications. Its relative lack of integration, openness to learning, and influenceability create opportunities for "mild suspension[s] of critical judgment" (p. 24), in which people pursue actions that they know are wrong, but "...unconsciously long for permission to do" (p. 29). In this way, lapses in judgment conform structurally to intersystemic conflict except that, in compromises of integrity, superego censorship fails, and forbidden wishes are expressed.

Rangell (1974) cites "uncontrollable and unsatisfiable narcissism" (p. 8) as the driving force in compromises of integrity. "[I]nstantial pressures are to neurosis as ego interests are to the compromises of integrity" (p. 8). In terms of subjective experience, an individual who perceives others' successes as achieved unfairly may feel justified in acting dishonestly. To paraphrase Arlow (1982), he tells himself: "Everyone else does it!" In structural terms, ego interests undermine the prohibiting function of conscience. Inaccurate perception justifies the direct gratification of needs. In this way, the superego capitulates to ego interests and permits conflict to be resolved "...in favor of narcissism at the expense of principle" (Rangell, 1974, p. 10).

Compromises also result from a lack of ego strength. Rangell (1974, 1976) portrayed the ego as relinquishing control over one set of aims because it cannot mediate effectively between the forces of morality and self-interest. This, too, implies a weakened superego, but Rangell instead argues that the ego, because of its own enfeeblement, avoids conflict by pursuing those aims that it can neither inhibit nor delay. The superego is "subverted by anxiety" (Arlow, 1971, p. 333). Ultimately, repression is the means by which intersystemic and intrasystemic compromises are achieved.

Perversion and Hypocrisy

Renik (1992) and Grossman (1993) focused on the distortions of reality implicit in moral lapses. Their perspective was grounded in Arlow's (1971) concept of character perversion in which specific character traits replace perverse tendencies during development. Specifically, Arlow asserted that in male patients, these traits replace the traumatic perception of female castration with a real, but peripheral, perception corresponding to the unconscious fantasy of a phallic female. The reassuring unconscious fantasy reduces conflict by

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substituting for the anxiety-provoking perception. However, Renik and Grossman expanded the concept beyond the structural similarity and etiologic homogeneity that Arlow posited.

Renik (1992) radicalized Arlow's account in two significant ways. First, he rejected the Freudian claim for the etiologic necessity of castration anxiety. Fetishes "...relieve all sorts of troublesome concerns—not just castration anxiety" (p. 544). They do so by providing "... an unusual degree of conviction about the reality of a reassuring idea that is achieved when a particular material object (the fetish) is actually present" (p. 545). The idea is neither unconscious nor does it replace veridical perception completely. Instead it is "...maintained alongside reality with equal conviction" (p. 549). Thus, Renik (1984) also expanded the meaning of disavowal to include both denials of traumatic perceptions and "...less complete avoidances in which some component of a perception may enter consciousness, but as an 'unreality'" (1984, pp. 527-528). Disavowal subsumes both splitting of the ego and unconscious fantasies that achieve some degree of consciousness.

Second, Renik (1992) conceptualized fetishes as a specific mode of cognition in which the distinction between fantasy and reality is blurred. It allows the patient to maintain beliefs and fantasies about his or her relationship with the analyst despite disconfirming evidence. It subsumes any experience in which illusion coexists with perception without repression.

Moral lapses occur when the patient takes "the path of least resistance" (Renik, 1992, p. 551) rather than facing painful truths about himself or herself. He or she avoids the dysphoric affect that attends such knowledge, even if this means behaving in a way that is discrepant with his or her moral standards. Renik noted that this avoidance is possible only in the context of a perspective and value system that lacks consistency and integration. It thus tends to be a chronic problem involving compromise formations within the superego.

Grossman (1993) extended Renik's idea of the fetishist's mode of cognition, labeling it "the perverse attitude toward reality." The patient holds two

contradictory ideas or attitudes “without feeling the obligation to reconcile the two.... [T]he perception is available; but it does not have the evidentiary value to influence the cherished belief” (pp. 427-428). The meaning of splitting of the ego, largely implicit in the writings of Arlow and Renik, is altered from a phenomenon permitting contradictory attitudes toward a traumatic perception to denoting the persistence of unconscious fantasy alongside one's perceptions. The fantasy does not replace the perception completely; it is retained in consciousness, but with reality testing suspended (Grossman, 1996).

For illustrative purposes, Grossman (1993) offered a vignette from the analysis of a probation officer who inappropriately touches a female client while struggling, in his treatment, with fantasies of molesting young girls. As the incident unfolds, the man recalls thinking that he might get in trouble, but reports that he “turned down the volume on reality” (p. 422). Although conscious, the potential consequences of his actions are rendered less real and therefore dismissible. Structurally, the inhibitory function of the ego and, by implication, the prohibiting function of the superego are undermined, allowing direct gratification of a forbidden wish.

Research on Moral Hypocrisy

Batson and his coworkers interrogated hypocrisy from a different perspective. In a series of studies (Batson, Kobrynowicz, Dinnerstein, Kampf, & Wilson, 1997; Batson et al., 1999),

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participants were asked to assign themselves and a (fictitious) partner either to a reward (raffle ticket) or nonreward (dull lecture) task. Participants were told that their decisions were private and their partner will believe they were made unbiasedly (coin flip). Batson et al. reasoned that if subjects are motivated primarily by moral principle, introducing an element of ambiguity into the selection process should have no impact. Task assignments should be distributed equally. Under these conditions, however, two behaviors were observed consistently: First, 70%-80% of participants assigned themselves to the reward task. Second, among these individuals, only 10% rated their behavior as morally responsible. In other words, they recognized and acknowledged the discrepancy between their actions and moral standards. By capitulating to impulses serving their self-interests, they evidenced superego weakness but not hypocrisy. They did not deceive others into thinking that they are morally better than the others.

In a second study, Batson, Thompson, and Chen (2002) made procedural fairness (coin flip) salient and gathered ratings on important aspects of morality, including social responsibility (Berkowitz & Lutterman, 1968), ascription of responsibility (Schwartz, 1969), justice perspective (Kohlberg, 1976), and relationship-care perspective (Gilligan, 1982). These ratings permitted them to test two alternative hypotheses: first, that moral hypocrisy is the result of inadequate learning or ambiguity of moral standards rather than the low salience of the latter; and second, that this effect is limited to or more frequently

observed in individuals rating low in moral responsibility (Batson et al., 2002). Not surprisingly, those individuals electing not to flip the coin assigned themselves to the reward task more frequently (.80-.90) and rated lower than control participants on a combined index of personal moral responsibility (PMR). By contrast, although PMR was positively correlated with procedural fairness (coin flip), it was negatively correlated with the fairness of actual task assignments. Despite their high PMR, the vast majority of them (.85-.90) nevertheless assigned themselves to the reward task regardless of the outcome of the coin flip. Thus, PMR was positively correlated with the decision to flip the coin but not with actual task assignment. Despite utilizing an unbiased selection procedure, participants disavowed its results. "...[T]hose with a greater sense of moral responsibility did not show signs of greater moral integrity; they showed signs of greater hypocrisy" (Batson et al., 2002, p. 330-331).

Batson et al. (2002) drew four broad conclusions from their research: First, moral hypocrisy is equally distributed across gender. Second, increased self-awareness alone does not lessen hypocrisy. Hypocrisy is decreased only when self-awareness is accompanied by salient moral standards. Specifically, unless the morally correct choice is made salient shortly before decision-making, increased self-awareness has little impact. Third, when behavior conflicts with moral standards, it is the latter rather than the former that are likely to change. This finding is completely consistent with almost 50 years of research on cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957). Rather than changing their behavior, participants reinterpreted their self-interests as moral or, more ominously, moral decisions as immoral. Fourth, even when individuals made the morally correct choice, their actions may not have resulted from the stimulation of moral integrity, but from the need to reduce the dissonance created by awareness of a behavior-standard discrepancy. That is, those motivated by moral hypocrisy sometimes behave morally as the least costly way to appear moral (Batson et al., 1999).

Evaluating Four Psychoanalytic Hypotheses

Contemporary theorists attribute immoral behavior either to inter- or intrasystemic compromise formations within the superego or to actual superego weakness resulting from

narcissistic disturbances and pathological splitting. In the latter, the subject splits a single perception into its all-good and all-bad mental representations. The former are incorporated into the self with a correspondingly unrealistic enhancement of self-esteem; the latter are projected and, in turn, experienced as persecutory and critical. Kernberg (1984) reasoned that the incorporation of the positive aspects of the superego weakened internal morality in two distinct ways: First, it appropriates to the self those loving, esteem-enhancing aspects of the ego ideal that otherwise form the basis for values and ideals. Second, it precluded integration of the split off negative representations by shunting all of the “good” representations from the superego to the self, which establishes the grandiose self. For the narcissist, values and moral principles therefore are self-serving, and prohibitions are experienced as external rather than internal.

That the subject possesses two affectively polarized and unintegrated representations of significant others bespeaks not only significant psychopathology but also compromised reality testing. For this reason, linking moral hypocrisy to pathological narcissism requires a questionable extension of borderline and narcissistic pathology to individuals who fail to meet the diagnostic criteria for these disorders. However, it does not preclude examination of the lesser claim, articulated by Rangell (1984), that narcissistic aims or ego interests, broadly conceived, play a causal role. This claim, along with three additional hypotheses, is evaluated below.

1. Moral hypocrisy is a form of narcissism. Rangell (1984) argued that narcissism is a motivational force capable of causing moral lapses as well as actions that are hypocritical. Hypocrisy may be described as a subset of the larger class of narcissistic aims that are distinct from libidinal or aggressive ones. However, the meanings of narcissism and its aims are quite diverse, ranging from the “...solicitation of the affection and assistance of others with minimal return of affection and assistance...” (Schafer, 1948, p. 46) to power, ambition, and opportunism (Rangell, 1980). Indeed, outside of psychoanalysis, four factors have been identified in the narcissism construct (Emmons, 1987): Leadership/ Authority, Superiority/Arrogance, Self-Absorption/Self-Admiration, and Exploiteness/ Entitlement, only the last of which correlates with pathological narcissism. Narcissism varies from a normal personality trait showing a positive correlation with independent measures of self-esteem (Emmons, 1984) to a characteristic of severe psychopathology. This diversity creates difficulty for those wishing to attribute causal or etiologic significance to narcissism. A lesser, but more defensible, claim holds that hypocrisy offers a way to secure rewards without great personal cost in individuals for whom tribute and recognition are important. Hypocrisy therefore seems consistent with narcissistic motives construed more generally as reflecting self-absorption, self-interest, and the inordinate need for attention and recognition.

However, even a less theory-driven definition of narcissism fails to account for the complexity of intentions involved in hypocrisy. Recall the example of John who evinced many of these characteristics in choosing not to disclose his marital infidelity and questionable financial decisions. He lied to avoid uncomfortable affect, the denigration he anticipated upon discovery, and the obligation to act responsibly once he acknowledged his misdeeds. Following Renik (1992) and Grossman (1993), one might hypothesize that his discomfort was so great that he disavowed the likely consequences of his actions. Concerns about detection certainly entered his mind but were accompanied by the fantasy that untoward consequences were unlikely. Because this fantasy remained untested, he felt no obligation to take actions to forestall the inevitable outcome.

Does this interpretation represent a complete or adequate description of John's behavior? Does it satisfactorily describe the motivations most salient to his actions? That

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John disavows a perception to avoid painful affects derivative of frustrated narcissistic aims represents only part of what he is doing. He also makes a concerted effort to be perceived as conforming to expectations while deceptively pursuing his own interests. He further endeavors to reap the rewards of his feigned compliance undeservedly. He wants the love and recognition that follow from responsible action without demonstrating the courage to face the barriers, both internal and external, to acting responsibly. What is crucial, therefore, is not simply his narcissism, but his hypocrisy.

Logically, the claim that hypocrisy is a form of narcissism validly can be falsified, *modus tollens*, by the identification of a single instance of non-narcissistic hypocrisy. So-called "victim hypocrites" (Kittay, 1982) represent just such a counterexample. Consider the example of a gay college football player who conceals his unconflicted sexual proclivities for fear of discrimination. He correctly perceives that many of his teammates are homophobic and that disclosure of his sexual orientation jeopardizes his standing with them and with the coaching staff. In the course of socializing with his teammates, he makes disparaging comments about homosexuality in keeping with their views so as to maintain his cover. How are we to judge the hypocrisy of his disparaging remarks? It is clearly hypocritical of him to deceive others into thinking that he shares their beliefs and to reap the rewards of this deception. In a sense, his actions also serve his interests. Yet, reducing his hypocrisy to narcissism does

not explain a very important aspect of his motivations: his wish to avoid unfair treatment. While avoiding discrimination may be said to serve self-interest, it is confusing clinically, logically, and morally to call it narcissistic. Neither does narcissism account for the differences Batson et al. (2002) observed between experimental and control groups. Because group assignments are randomized, it is unlikely that differences in narcissistic pathology among participants explain the moral hypocrisy effect. For these reasons, narcissism, whether conceptualized as an impulse or ego interest, is a relevant, but insufficient explanation of moral hypocrisy.

2. Moral hypocrisy results from superego weakness. In this view, the superego is characterized alternately as weak, overwhelmed by conflict, overpowered by wishes, or undermined by anxiety. The concept of superego weakness explains a variety of behaviors resulting from a breakthrough of impulse. For example, it explains the actions of a principled vegetarian, Victor, who, overcome by its aroma, eats the freshly cooked meat loaf despite knowing that he is doing something wrong (Turner, 1990). His actions bespeak superego weakness and hypocrisy because he violates his own deeply held moral principles. But, by contrasting two variations on this example, Szabados and Soifer (2004) argued that reducing hypocrisy to a form of superego weakness confused an important distinction.

Suppose that Victor is truly upset about his violation because it is at variance with his internal standards. He truly believes that the wholesale slaughter and suffering of animals is unconscionable. He feels guilty, uncomfortable, and disappointed in himself after eating the meat loaf. By contrast, Henry, also a vegetarian, takes great pride in being perceived as an advocate of animal rights and is critical of people who do not live up to his standards. Unlike Victor, Henry waits until the other guests are out of the kitchen and helps himself to the meat loaf. He shows discomfort only when his transgression is detected. Further, he makes excuses for his lapse in a way that suggests that he is more concerned with how he appears to others than "...with his internal moral standing" (Szabados & Soifer, 2004, p. 280). Although both individuals show moral weakness, Henry's behavior is calculated to enhance his image with others. Rather than reacting with anxiety and discomfort over an impulsive action, Henry demonstrates a calm, deliberate strategy of deception. This is a distinction that holds great relevance clinically. The concept of superego weakness alone

does not explain why Henry takes additional measures to maintain his appearance through deception. By contrast, Victor, like the research subjects who choose not to flip the coin and rate the morality of their actions negatively, neither deceives nor attempts to appear morally better than he is.

Although superego weakness permits the pursuit of self-interest, it fails to adequately explain deception. In addition, following Batson et al. (1999, 2002), it does not explain why people who ignore the results of procedural fairness view their behavior as morally correct when clearly it is not. Because their design randomizes group assignments, superego integration should not differ significantly between groups. Therefore, challenging their conclusions requires the identification of a variable that predicts the behavior of each group. The concept of superego weakness simply is inadequate to the task.

3. Moral hypocrisy is inversely proportional to moral responsibility/integrity. This assertion rests on the idea that superego integration is antithetical to immoral behavior. Integrity, by definition, means resistance to corruption. It is something one either has or has not achieved. To suggest anything other than an inverse relationship between moral hypocrisy and integrity is contradictory and absurd.

If integrity is conceptualized as a virtue that one possesses to varying degrees and that is more discernible in some contexts than others, sincere commitment to a normative value system ought to lessen the likelihood of hypocrisy. However, the very opposite seems to be true (Batson et al., 1997, 1999, 2002). Higher levels of moral responsibility correlate with a greater incidence of hypocrisy. That is, those individuals rating higher on an index of PMR make greater efforts to appear moral. Similarly, under conditions in which moral salience and self-awareness are increased, moral behavior is not necessarily prompted by the stimulation of moral integrity but by the fact that being moral is sometimes the most expedient way of appearing moral.

4. Descriptively, moral hypocrisy entails disavowal. The findings of Batson et al. (1999, 2000) are consistent with the notion that hypocrisy represents a compromise among conflicting perceptions or beliefs. Their findings accord with Festinger's (1957) model, which stipulates that dissonance among cognitions fuels efforts to restore consistency and with the view of the superego as an amalgam of identifications, beliefs, and edicts lacking overall integration (Arlow, 1982; Hartmann, 1960). Indeed, Arlow's perspective rather easily accommodates the fact that, even in hypocrisy, one is conforming to some moral standards while violating others. Rangell's (2000) more recent statement on hypocrisy also accords with this view. Descriptively, he suggested that the hypocrite lives a contradictory existence in which "...both arms of conflict are

gratified...[and]...the mores of civilization are treated as though they are being followed, whereas in reality a separate code of conduct reigns" (p. 311). Compromise enables self-deception while permitting contradictory sets of ideas to remain conscious. Hypocrisy may be limited to one area of life with others left relatively unaffected. If recognized at all, the moral implications of hypocrisy are more readily disavowed because the individual perceives him or herself as decent and honest generally.

Similarly, the work of Batson et al. (1997, 2002) highlights the inconsistent guidance of conscience and complexity of motivations that characterize moral conflict and compromise. If they are correct in postulating moral hypocrisy as a motive, then individuals are more likely to engage in behaviors that create the appearance of morality and, to borrow Grossman's (1993) terms, maintain their cherished beliefs in their integrity, even when their behavior departs from their own moral standards. Individuals deceive themselves (and/or others) by disavowing this discrepancy. Although not consistent with any particular etiology, these findings support the usefulness of the concept of disavowal in the

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explanation of moral hypocrisy in the absence of more severe psychopathology. Extending the meaning of disavowal in this way finds support in the psychoanalytic literature as well (Basch, 1983; Jaffe, 1988).

Psychoanalytic Reality

Freud carefully distinguishes reality testing from moral judgment, limiting the former to the ego and the latter to the superego's function of censorship. Clinically, reality testing is assessed by identifying the presence of first-rank symptoms and/or grossly inappropriate affect, behavior, and thought content. In addition, the patient must be able to adopt the clinician's point of view to account for any evidence of such findings (Kernberg, 1984). Although psychoanalysts of various persuasions conceptualize the reasons for and meanings of these findings differently, they nevertheless represent symptoms of cardinal diagnostic relevance. In the absence of any specific findings, reality testing is said to be maintained. Most important, none of these findings directly implicate superego functioning.

Superego integration is evaluated in terms of the degree to which the patient "...identifies with ethical values and has normal guilt as a major regulator...; abstain[s] from the exploitation, manipulation, or mistreatment of others; and...maintain[s] honesty and moral integrity in the absence of external controls" (Kernberg, 1984, p. 21). The psychopath, for example, does not misconstrue moral standards or necessarily confuse inner reality with perception. These individuals violate the rights of others because they do not share the prevailing system of normative values. Successful antisocial behavior depends upon the ability to test reality effectively.

Grossman (1993) argued that one engages in immoral behavior when one reasons that the likelihood of detection is small. "Turning down the volume on reality" allows one to treat "unwanted perceptions as if they were not real despite knowledge to the contrary" (Grossman, 1996, p. 512). The important distinction is not between fantasy and reality, but between "...tested reality and untested fantasy" (p. 509). Like Winnicott's idea of illusion, these fantasies are unconscious. Hypocrisy reflects a "...disordered conscience that allows the subject to act as if he were unable to distinguish fantasy from reality" (p. 513). He can test reality, but protects himself from disturbing emotions by not doing so.

When the probation officer in Grossman's (1993) example inappropriately touches his female ward, he gives inadequate evidentiary weight to the consequences of his actions. He disregards the idea of detection despite knowing the truth to be otherwise. Grossman is correct in identifying a reality issue here—namely, evaluating the likely consequences of behavior. However, by linking disavowal and splitting inextricably to reality testing, Grossman placed himself in the untenable position of having to explain why this patient disavows a perception that accurately represents reality. That is, given the circumstances, the officer may be correct in concluding that he is unlikely to get caught. However, if this is the case, what possible motive would he have for disavowing a perception that gives him license to gratify his wishes? The only answer to this question can only be a moral or ethical one. Reality testing alone cannot explain his actions.

On closer examination, the unconscious and untested fantasies Grossman (1993) offered as examples are neither unconscious nor untested. The probation officer consciously imagines the molestation, considers its consequences, and thus tests their reality. If any of these were unconscious, presumably defenses other than disavowal would be deployed. Instead, he disavows the consequences and fondles the adolescent. Reality

testing is maintained throughout, but without concern about moral implications. Grossman accurately underscored the failure of conscience but views it in terms of superego weakness. That is, the forbidden wish or unconscious fantasy overwhelms the officer in the same way that the aroma of the meat loaf overwhelmed Victor. To paraphrase Grossman, by not testing the fantasy that he will get in trouble, the probation officer feels free to gratify his fantasy of molesting the girl. Veridical perception is disavowed in the service of unconscious fantasy, allowing the patient to avoid facing painful truths about himself or herself.

But, inasmuch as it may be gleaned from Grossman's (1993) vignette, this interpretation runs afoul of the facts. Not only is the officer's fantasy tested, but, even if it were not, Grossman's description still failed to specify the unique feature of the officer's actions: deception. More than superego weakness, the probation officer's actions underscore his hypocrisy. After all, he did not simply gratify a forbidden wish. He did so in a way that was intended to appear moral. His fantasy was enacted so as to make the touching appear inadvertent rather than intentional and to allow him to appear to those around him to be morally better than he is. Although we cannot determine the degree to which his own standards of moral conduct were violated, his actions represent an excellent example of the "motive to appear moral in one's own and others' eyes while, if possible, avoiding the cost of actually being moral" (Batson et al., 1999, p. 525). What is disavowed is not perceptual, but rather moral. His behavior reflects his deceptive efforts to conceal this deviation from both himself and others.

Conclusion

Hypocrites do not practice what they preach. Their actions may appear altruistic and sometimes have positive consequences for others, but ultimately they are self-serving. In this way, hypocrisy bespeaks a complexity of motives in keeping with postmodern sensibility: Rarely does behavior serve as a reliable guide to inner intentions, rather it reflects diverse aims that may be construed in multiple ways, leaving the observer always somewhat uncertain as to its truth. What unifies hypocrisy as a concept is the consistent pursuit of self-interest under the guise of moral rectitude.

Rangell (1980) emphasized the powerful role played by self-interest in his syndrome of compromise of integrity and establishes the relevance of narcissism and superego weakness to its understanding. However, although recognizing the duality of purpose operating in hypocrisy, his descriptive insights are not easily

reconciled with Freud's structural model. The hypocrite does not simply gratify narcissistic wishes or act immorally, but does so while wearing a mask of virtue. Rangell reasoned that the individual's identification with a charismatic leadership releases him or her from internalized standards and thus occasions moral lapses. However, if identification truly alters internal morality, why does the individual feel the need to deceive unsuspecting others into believing that he or she shares their values? Logically, this identification should permit the individual to act without concern about consequences, appearance, or morality. If this identification is instead a partial one that occasions actions only in circumstances in which their consequences have been evaluated carefully, then Rangell's characterization of hypocrisy as the expression of repressed "unconscious longings" is less easily defended. By definition, impulses are peremptory and incompatible with the degree of internal organization necessary for such discrimination. Deceptive behavior is complex, contextual, and highly differentiated.

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In the absence of corrupting external influence or more severe psychopathology, Rangell's (1980) argument does not explain how ego interests or repressed wishes escape censorship nor does narcissism alone adequately differentiate morally hypocritical from amoral or antisocial behavior. One can desperately crave attention and recognition without violating moral standards or pretending to be anything more or less than one is. Moral hypocrisy may represent one possible outcome of frustrated narcissism, but the former cannot be reduced to the latter.

Disavowal as a general defense mechanism enjoys greater evidentiary support. Rangell's (2000) more recent work accords with this view, although it blurs important distinctions by including disavowal under the rubric of repression. Renik (1992) and Grossman (1993) made an important contribution to psychoanalysis by radicalizing the relationship between character perversions and moral lapses as well as immoral behavior. However, the claim that disavowal of reality and/or the failure to test unconscious fantasies explains moral lapses is at best speculative. By contrast, there is strong support for the notion that what is disavowed is the salient moral principle or, as described by Batson et al. (1997), the behavior-moral standard comparison. Awareness of this disparity provokes anxiety and triggers disavowal. Essentially, both the behavior and moral standard are conscious, but the degree and implications of the disparity between them are disavowed.

Additional defenses maintain this (mis)perception. Whereas displacement has received the greatest attention historically, rationalization also plays a prominent role. The little league board members who espouse a rule change particularly advantageous to their children on the grounds that it is for the greater good rationalize their selfish intentions on the basis of their positive consequences. They may be only dimly aware that their actions are self-serving.

Grossman's (1993) emphasis on the relative failure to test reality with regard to the consequences of fantasy enactment displaces attention away from the real problem: Deception of self and/or others facilitates wish gratification while allowing the patient to reap the rewards of appearing moral. Renik (1992) is right in claiming that the patient does not want to face painful truths. Such individuals want to avoid the turmoil created by the clear vision of violating their beliefs. Lifting the mask reveals a stark contrast between real and idealized self-images that, in turn, precludes the pursuit of self-interest without anxiety and tension. Now, however, they are precluded from wish fulfillment not by the fear of detection or of something external, but by awareness of their own moral principles. The results of this more penetrating examination of (moral) motivations and the stripping away of illusions that it engenders prompt disavowal.

Hypocrisy reveals a double standard toward a (parental) object in which the hypocrite deceives the very people upon whom he or she depends for genuine expressions of love and recognition. Disavowal operates multiply to facilitate belief in these responses as well as to affirm identity and permit contradictory perceptions to coexist. Although pursued deceptively, relationships paradoxically engender experiences which, through self-deception, are believed. The hypocrite both deceives and is deceived. The hypocrite's gambit forecloses shame experiences by strengthening belief in the expurgated evidence of his or her misdeeds. Hypocrisy therefore implies a relationship to an internalized other in which one wishes both to be seen and not to be seen. These contradictory wishes are sustained by disavowal.

The research of Batson et al. (1997) challenges analysts to think more clearly about the dynamic relationship among motives, internalized moral standards, and behavior. This complexity has been long recognized but has been difficult to address within the confines

of a model predicated on the establishment of inner morality. In it, immoral behavior of any kind betokens superego corruption and, by extension, moral lapses and compromises of integrity differ from antisocial behavior only by degree. In contradistinction to this perspective, I have argued that moral hypocrisy is a complex phenomenon expressing a highly contextual duality of purpose in which moral standards exist, but are disavowed. Batson et al. underscored the importance of this phenomenon by demonstrating the ease with which it is elicited and the frequency with which it occurs. Their work raises the uncomfortable question as to whether all of us are vulnerable to hypocrisy under the right circumstances. For these reasons, it is inaccurate to uncritically attribute moral hypocrisy to borderline or narcissistic psychopathology.

Batson et al.'s (1997, 1999, 2002) perspective has two important implications for treatment. First, increased self-awareness plays a facilitating role in diminishing hypocrisy. This is especially true when moral standards are made salient in a timely or opportune fashion. If patients respond positively to such interventions, their suitability for modified psychoanalytic treatment merits further consideration (Kernberg, 1984). Second, at a technical level, establishing the salience of moral standards may involve the analyst in interactions that are difficult to reconcile with the concept of neutrality. The analyst's stance requires both empathic exploration of the painful experiences that are effortlessly disavowed and confrontation of the patient's actions, both anticipated and real. Following Grossman (1993), this "...may require the analyst to take a stand with respect to the demands of reality..." (p. 433). However, this stance must be not only the sensitive, noncritical one advocated by Grossman and Renik (1992), but also must address the moral implications of thoughts, feelings, and behavior.

Through analysis, the patient may find the courage to examine the values, beliefs, and perceptions hidden beneath the mask that is presented to the world and forge new, nondeceptive strategies for emotional and interpersonal problem-solving. Rather than behaving morally only when actions are public and/or require little personal sacrifice, the patient must discover or creatively fashion integrations of wishes, needs, values, and beliefs that afford him or her a better adaptation to the ever-expanding and complex social environment in which he or she lives. Following Erikson (1968), it is vital that the individual find ways to tolerate and integrate this diversity rather than seek solutions capriciously and arbitrarily. This task requires more than a strong superego or tamed impulses. It requires a perspective in which the intrinsic link between responsibility and trust is recognized as necessary for communal living. Rather than relinquishing self-interests, they must be redefined nondeceptively within a hierarchy of communal purposes and social relationships.

Neither simply a lapse of judgment nor a fleeting symptom, moral hypocrisy reflects a complex constellation of intentions irreducible to the pursuit of self-interest or recognition. Not to be construed circularly as the cause of these intentions, moral hypocrisy represents a mode of perceiving in which moral contradictions are disavowed. Whereas this experience is ego-syntonic for hypocrites, it is disquieting for those closest to him or her to discover his or her capacity to violate their trust as well as his or her own moral standards. "One of the most important lessons to be learned from the tragically common atrocities of the modern age...is that horrendous things are not done only by monsters" (Batson et al., 1999, p. 525). They are done by ordinary people who possess normative values and are otherwise empathic and sincerely interested in the rights of others. Recognizing that the human capacity for trust and responsibility must be viewed always in relation to the very real dangers of moral disengagement deepens empathy and offers the possibility of a more authentic engagement with our patients.

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