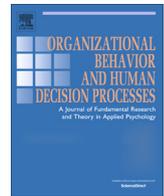




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Hypocrisy by association: When organizational membership increases condemnation for wrongdoing

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ABSTRACT

Hypocrisy occurs when people fail to practice what they preach. Four experiments document the *hypocrisy-by-association* effect, whereby failing to practice what an organization preaches can make an employee seem hypocritical and invite moral condemnation. Participants judged employees more harshly for the same transgression when it was inconsistent with ethical values the employees' organization promoted, and ascriptions of hypocrisy mediated this effect (Studies 1–3). The results did not support the possibility that inconsistent transgressions simply seemed more harmful. In Study 4, participants were less likely to select a job candidate whose transgression did (vs. did not) contradict a value promoted by an organization where he had once interned. The results suggest that employees are seen as morally obligated to uphold the values that their organization promotes, even by people outside of the organization. We discuss how observers will judge someone against different ethical standards depending on where she or he works.

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1. Introduction

People receive condemnation as hypocrites when they fail to practice the ethical values they preach. Consider the outraged reactions to former Senator Al Gore, who promoted environmental conservatism but spent \$30,000 per year on his home energy bill (Tapper, 2007), former New York Governor Eliot Spitzer who crusaded against sex trafficking but patronized prostitutes (Hakim & Santos, 2008), or the county judge who urged students to drive sober but was arrested for drunk driving (Lane, 2014). Arguably, these individuals would have received less condemnation for their behavior if they had not previously preached against it – in other words, judgments of them included an added hypocrisy penalty. Being perceived as hypocritical not only affects how harshly people are judged, but also can increase the punishment they receive for wrongdoing, can tarnish their reputation, and can even undermine their effectiveness as leaders (e.g., Laurent, Clark, Walker, & Wiseman, 2013; Palanski & Yammarino, 2011).

Organizations, like people, preach adherence to certain ethical values. For example, Greenpeace promotes environmentalism, the government encourages tax compliance, and a variety of firms

avow a commitment to diversity. However, not all members of an organization will always act consistently with the values it preaches. An office assistant at Greenpeace may have a high carbon footprint, or a manager at a firm that values diversity may forward a racially insensitive joke over email. How do people interpret these actions and react to the individuals responsible for them? Do the actions seem more contemptible in light of the actors' organizational membership? In other words, do people levy a hypocrisy penalty against someone who fails to uphold the values that his or her organization has promoted? The traditional understanding of hypocrisy – failing to practice what you preach – would suggest not, because in these cases the organization, not the individual, does the preaching. On the other hand, anecdotal evidence suggests that mere membership in an organization can make someone's behavior seem hypocritical. A Greenpeace employee was widely disparaged in the press for regularly traveling by plane instead of a more eco-friendly mode of transport (Davies, 2014), even though plenty of other people frequently make similar plane trips. Similarly, a report that 3% of US federal employees were delinquent on taxes sparked outrage, even though non-federal employees are more than 2.5 times more likely to be delinquent (Korte, 2014). If the individuals in question had worked for different organizations, perhaps they would not have garnered the same attention and derogation. But if these individuals are indeed hypocrites, they are only so by dint of their organizational association.

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The present research investigates the possibility that this *hypocrisy-by-association* effect drives social judgments of wrongdoing. We propose that people receive greater condemnation for the same transgression when it contradicts an ethical value that their organization promotes. By “ethical value” (hereafter: “value” for short), we mean a belief, principle, goal, or standard that indicates concern with the interests and welfare of individuals or society (for a similar definition, see Aquino, Freeman, Reed, Lim, & Felps, 2009). By “transgressions,” we mean behaviors that violate an ethical value. Organizations often promote domain-specific ethical values, such as environmentalism, diversity, or nonviolence. Thus, the same transgression may violate a value that is promoted by one organization but not another. The present research examines how employees who transgress their current or former organization’s values are judged by people outside of the organization – those who might learn about the transgression in the newspaper, while sitting on a jury, or when interviewing the transgressor for a new job.

Our investigation of the hypocrisy-by-association effect sheds new light on the psychology of social judgment in organizational contexts. We examine whether employees who fail to conform to values promoted by their organization will face condemnation as hypocrites, even if they did not explicitly promote those values themselves. We posit that working for an organization whose values one is unwilling or unable to follow can have serious consequences for how one is judged at the time and for one’s reputation going forward.

1.1. Judgments of hypocrisy

Hypocrisy is defined as “the practice of claiming to have moral standards or beliefs to which one’s own behavior does not conform” (hypocrisy, n.d.). People feel and appear hypocritical when they fail to “practice what they preach” (Stone & Fernandez, 2008), “say one thing but do another” (Barden, Rucker, & Petty, 2005; Barden, Rucker, Petty, & Rios, 2014), hold themselves to more lenient ethical standards than others (Lammers, 2012; Lammers, Stapel, & Galinsky, 2010; Polman & Ruttan, 2012; Valdesolo & DeSteno, 2007), present themselves as more moral than they actually are (Gilbert & Jones, 1986), or disingenuously display support for ethical values (Monin & Merritt, 2012). Implicit in these characterizations of hypocrisy is the assumption that a hypocrite tries to intentionally mislead others to grant him greater moral standing than he deserves (Hale & Pillow, 2015).

Research suggests that endorsing a particular value morally obligates people to follow it themselves. People feel angry and disgusted when they observe hypocrisy (Laurent et al., 2013). They are less inclined to let hypocrites off the hook for bad behavior in light of prior good deeds (Effron & Monin, 2010), and they enjoy seeing hypocrites punished (Powell & Smith, 2012; Smith, Powell, Combs, & Schurtz, 2009). In organizational contexts, leaders who fail to practice what they preach undermine followers’ trust, commitment, performance, and willingness to adopt change (Cha & Edmondson, 2006; Davis & Rothstein, 2006; Greenbaum, Mawritz, & Piccolo, 2015; Leroy, Palanski, & Simons, 2012; Palanski & Yammarino, 2011; Simons, 1999, 2002). Leader hypocrisy can even promote deviant and unethical behaviors within firms (Dineen, Lewicki, & Tomlinson, 2006; Peterson, 2004).

We suggest that by focusing on the failure of individuals to practice what they themselves preach, prior research has captured only a narrow range of circumstances that lead to ascriptions of hypocrisy, neglecting a type of hypocrisy that is germane to organizations. Going beyond this research, we propose that individuals who fail to practice what their organization preaches also risk moral condemnation. In essence, organizational membership can make people vulnerable to charges of hypocrisy.

1.2. Organizational membership sets ethical standards

Why would a person seem hypocritical if she transgressed values promoted by her organization? On the one hand, such behavior does not fit the conventional understanding of hypocrisy: Organizational membership does not require “preaching,” explicitly claiming to share the organization’s values, or intentionally tricking people into overestimating one’s morality. On the other hand, observers may treat organizational membership *as if* it were a form of preaching. By joining an organization, employees may be seen as endorsing its values – that is, publicly presenting themselves as supporting them. The endorsement is merely implicit, however, in the sense that it is implied by membership itself even if an employee has not explicitly promoted the values. In other words, joining an organization may not be a literal declaration of support for its values, but it may be perceived as if it were. A person who transgresses values that he *explicitly* endorsed is seen as morally disingenuous – a hypocrite who has tried to mislead people about his moral standing. Moving beyond this observation, we propose that transgressing a value that one seems to have *implicitly* endorsed is sufficient to make one seem hypocritical, and that organizational membership is perceived as such an endorsement. As a consequence, employees will receive harsher condemnation for the same transgression when it specifically violates their organization’s values than when it does not. In other words, an employee who violates her organization’s values elicits increased condemnation, as if she had presented herself as more moral than she really is.

In this way, we propose, organizational membership does more than merely signal what employees are likely to value; it prescribes the values that they are obligated to uphold, thereby establishing a higher moral standard against which they are judged. For example, people may reasonably assume that an office manager at Greenpeace cares about environmentalism. However, if they learned that he never recycles at home, we predict that they would not simply revise their assumption and conclude that he took the job for reasons unrelated to its values (e.g., the location or lifestyle it afforded); they would derogate his moral character and want to punish him, condemning him more than they would a non-Greenpeace employee for the same failure to recycle. Such reactions would indicate that they were holding him to a higher ethical standard than they would hold employees of other organizations, treating him as if he had hypocritically transgressed values that he had (implicitly) presented himself as having. Thus, the existence of a hypocrisy-by-association effect would suggest that people do not merely assume that an employee shares her organizations’ values, but that they believe that she is morally obligated to uphold those values.

We suggest that when employees’ transgressions contradict values that the organization has promoted, even people outside the organization will negatively evaluate the employees’ moral character and recommend more severe punishment – reactions that damage the employees’ reputations and their prospects for future employment. Our theorizing points to our central hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1 (H1). Objective observers will condemn an employee’s transgression more harshly when it is inconsistent (vs. not inconsistent) with values that his or her organization promotes.

We refer to this hypothesized effect as an *inconsistency penalty*. By “condemn,” we mean negatively evaluate employees’ character and behavior, and desire to punish them or to deprive them of rewards (e.g., a disinclination to hire them in the future). We use the term “objective observers” to mean people outside the employee’s organization who can form a judgment about his or her behavior.

If, as we have suggested, observers consider employment as an implicit endorsement of values that the organization has promoted, then they should judge an employee as hypocritical for transgressing those values – much like they would judge her for transgressing values that she had promoted herself. Thus, we also predict that observers will levy inconsistency penalties because they perceive employees whose behaviors contradict organizational values as hypocritical.

Hypothesis 2 (H2). Ascriptions of hypocrisy explain the inconsistency penalty.

In other words, the hypocrisy-by-association effect posits a causal path from inconsistent behavior to ascriptions of hypocrisy to condemnation.

People may be so averse to hypocrisy that they will levy an inconsistency penalty against those whose organizational memberships are tenuous or low status (e.g., a brand-new employee or an intern from two summers ago). That is, people may treat organizational membership at any level as if it were an implicit endorsement of the organization's values. However, a member's position in the hierarchy may determine the severity of condemnation that person receives for hypocrisy-by-association. In particular, holding a leadership position may seem like a particularly strong implicit endorsement because leaders' judgments and actions convey an organization's core ideology and ethical norms (Grojean, Resick, Dickson, & Smith, 2004; Palmer, 2012; Schein, 1985). Leaders also tend to receive more blame than non-leaders for organizationally relevant transgressions (Karelaia & Keck, 2013). Thus, we examined the potential moderating role of position in the organization:

Hypothesis 3 (H3). Both higher- and lower-level employees will receive more condemnation for a transgression that is inconsistent (vs. not inconsistent) with values their organization promotes, but this effect will be larger for higher-level employees.

In other words, we posit that higher-level employees, such as managers and executives, will receive a larger inconsistency penalty.

1.3. Robustness checks

We considered two mechanisms besides hypocrisy ascriptions that could explain the inconsistency penalty. First, transgressions that are inconsistent with an organization's values might seem particularly harmful to the organization, leading observers to assume that these transgressions will generate negative publicity, undermine the organization's credibility, and interfere with organizational goals because they contradict the organization's stated values. Such transgressions could also make the organization seem particularly incompetent for hiring the transgressor – or raise the possibility that the employer does not genuinely care about its values. In short, the inconsistency penalty could result from perceived collateral damage rather than from ascriptions of hypocrisy. To address this alternative, we measured and controlled for harm perceptions.

A second alternative explanation for the inconsistency penalty is perceptual contrast (e.g., Herr, 1986; Murphy, Balzer, Lockhart, & Eisenman, 1985; Sherif & Hovland, 1961; Wexley, Sanders, & Yukel, 1973). An individual's transgressions may seem worse when contrasted against any relevant values, even those espoused by an organization to which the individual does not belong. For example, an act of racial discrimination by a bank employee may seem particularly egregious to observers who have recently contemplated an unrelated law firm's anti-discrimination policies. This mechanism predicts that simply priming people with values promoted

by any organization will make the transgression seem worse. By contrast, we predicted that an employee must actually be or have been associated with the relevant organization for the hypocrisy-by-association effect to occur – even if the association is only tenuous – because people will not expect employees to have any special moral obligation to conform to the values of organizations other than their own. We tested these competing mechanisms in Study 2.

1.4. The present research

We conducted four experiments to test our hypotheses. Study 1 demonstrated both components of the hypocrisy-by-association effect: an inconsistency penalty (H1) mediated by perceptions of hypocrisy (H2), above and beyond mediation by perceptions of harm. Study 2 replicated this effect, ruled out a perceptual contrast mechanism, and showed that the effect emerged for both higher- and lower-level employees but was stronger for the former (H3). Whereas the first two studies showed that even newly hired employees can be condemned as hypocrites when they transgress their organization's values, Study 3 demonstrated that the hypocrisy-by-association effect can also occur for employees with longer tenure. Finally, providing further support for H1 in a more impactful context with a behavioral measure, Study 4 showed how the hypocrisy-by-association effect can have lasting consequences for employees' reputations and job prospects, even when the relevant organizational association was short, in the past, and tenuous (i.e., a previous summer internship).

2. Study 1

Study 1 participants read a news article about an employee who committed a transgression. We manipulated whether his organization promoted values that were contrary to the same transgression (*same-domain* condition), contrary to unrelated transgressions (*different-domain* condition), or not contrary to any particular transgression (*control* condition). H1 predicts that the employee will receive more condemnation in the same-domain condition than in the other two conditions; H2 predicts that this effect will be mediated by perceptions of hypocrisy.

2.1. Method

2.1.1. Participants

We recruited participants from Amazon.com's Mechanical Turk service (MTurk); everyone received \$.51. MTurk is an online labor market that is more diverse than traditional subject pools and yields data that are at least as reliable as those collected from such pools (Buhrmester, Kwang, & Gosling, 2011; Horton, Rand, & Zeckhauser, 2011; Paolacci, Chandler, & Ipeirotis, 2010). We promoted data quality by allowing participants to begin the study only if they answered a simple reading comprehension question correctly, and if their IP addresses were traceable to the US and did not duplicate previous respondents' IPs. (We also manually checked the data to exclude anyone who slipped through this filter; no one did.) Using a rule-of-thumb that 30 people per condition is sufficient to detect moderate-to-large effects, we aimed to recruit 90 participants. Ninety-three began the study and 92 completed it (50 females and 42 males, $M_{\text{age}} = 34.91$ years, $SD = 12.75$). We planned to exclude participants who had failed at least one of two attention-check questions (described below), but no one did.

2.1.2. Materials and manipulation

For a study entitled “Understanding and Interpreting the News,” participants read two newspaper articles, realistically formatted and ostensibly real but actually created for this study (adapted from Effron and Monin (2010); see Online Supplement, Appendix A). The first article described an organization that consulted to schools. Depending on randomly assigned condition, it was dedicated to reducing sexual harassment among students, to reducing drug abuse among students, or to designing software for organizing student records. Thus, the organization promoted anti-harassment values, anti-drug values, or no particular values. The article described how the organization pursued its goals (e.g., by training teachers to recognize sexual harassment, recognize drug abuse, or to use software) and presented evidence that it had been successful. The article also mentioned an executive vice president (the target person). To test whether failing to practice what the organization preached would be sufficient to spark condemnation, we wanted to avoid implying that the executive himself had preached the values, so we described him as the organization’s “newest executive hire.”

The second article, ostensibly published about one week after the first, described how the executive had been caught either possessing illegal drugs or sexually harassing a waitress. Specifically, the police had pulled him over for speeding and discovered a bag of cocaine, or several customers had seen him touching the waitress on the buttocks and making unwelcome, sexually explicit comments. In both cases, the executive indicated through a lawyer that he would not dispute the charges against him.

These materials form a 3 (values: anti-harassment vs. anti-drugs vs. none specified) \times 2 (transgression: harassment vs. drug use) factorial design. We collapsed this design into three conditions: a *same-domain* condition, in which the organization’s values were directly inconsistent with the executive’s transgression, a *different-domain* condition, in which the values were not inconsistent, and a control condition, in which the values were unspecified.

2.1.3. Measures

After the second article, participants answered three filler questions (i.e., how well-written, interesting, and newsworthy they found the article). Then they responded to a 15-item condemnation scale, adapted from prior research (Effron & Monin, 2010). Nine items assessed perceptions of the target person on 7-point bipolar scales (starred items reverse-coded): nice-awful, honest-dishonest, cruel-kind*, cold-warm*, unfair-fair*, moral-immoral, arrogant-humble*, good-bad, likable-dislikable. Participants used three items to rate the transgression: dishonorable, immoral, and inexcusable (1 = *not at all*, 5 = *extremely*). Finally, three items assessed punishment by asking participants to indicate their agreement with whether the target person “should be punished harshly,” whether he “should resign from his job,” and whether other “organizations definitely should not hire him” (1 = *disagree strongly*, 7 = *agree strongly*). As in prior research (Effron & Monin, 2010), the high correlations among items led us to standardize and then average all 15 items to form a composite measure of condemnation ($\alpha = .93$).

Participants also indicated how much they agreed or disagreed that the target person “is a hypocrite” – a measure of the hypothesized mediator used in previous studies (Effron & Monin, 2010); a similar measure was also used by Barden et al. (2005, 2014).

As a control variable, participants indicated how much they agreed or disagreed that the target’s behavior “harmed” the organization with which he had been associated. Because this item can encompass a variety of different kinds of harm (e.g., to the organization’s reputation, credibility, ability to achieve its goals, financial standing, etc.), controlling for it provides a particularly conservative test of our hypotheses.

2.1.4. Attention-checks

We included two multiple-choice attention checks. After reading the first article, participants were asked to report the organization’s mission (i.e., to reduce sexual harassment, reduce drug use, or create software). After reading the second article and answering all dependent measures, participants were asked to report the transgression that the employee was accused of committing (i.e., sexual harassment or drug use).¹

2.2. Results and discussion

Condemnation of the target person differed across conditions, $F(2,89) = 3.84, p = .03$ (see Fig. 1). A planned contrast showed that, as predicted by H1, participants expressed more condemnation in the same-domain condition (coded +2; $M = .28, SD = .56$) than in the other two conditions (each coded -1), $F(1,89) = 6.97, p < .01, d = .62$. The orthogonal contrast showed that condemnation did not differ significantly between the different-domain and the control conditions, (coded +1 and -1 ; same-domain condition coded 0; $M_{\text{control}} = -.20, SD = .72$; $M_{\text{different-domain}} = -.06, SD = .75$), $F(1,89) = .67, p = .42, d = .19$. Thus, participants’ judgments displayed a reliable inconsistency penalty. Additional analyses showed that the particular transgression committed (i.e., drug use vs. sexual harassment) did not significantly moderate these results, $p = .51$.

2.2.1. Mediation by hypocrisy

We next tested whether ascriptions of hypocrisy would mediate this inconsistency penalty. For this analysis, we coded the same-domain condition as +2 and the other conditions as -1 , we standardized hypocrisy, and we computed the bias-corrected, bootstrapped 95% CI for the indirect effect using 5000 resamples (Preacher & Hayes, 2004). Fig. 2 shows the resulting path diagram. Consistent with H2, the indirect effect of the manipulation through hypocrisy was significant, as indicated by a 95% CI around the coefficient that did not include 0, $b = .20 [.13, .29]$.² This mediation pathway remained significant when we controlled for perceptions that the target person’s behavior harmed the organization. Thus, it is difficult to explain the results by positing that the hypocrisy measure was a proxy for perceived harm.

In sum, Study 1 demonstrated the two criteria that establish a hypocrisy-by-association effect: (1) an employee received more condemnation for committing a transgression that was inconsistent (vs. not inconsistent) with his organization’s values, and (2) ascriptions of hypocrisy mediated this effect. Observers reading realistic news articles judged someone more severely for the same transgression when it represented a failure to practice what his organization preached than when it did not.

3. Study 2

Study 2 had three goals. First, it was designed to replicate the hypocrisy-by-association effect using different materials. Second, it examined the viability of an alternative explanation based on perceptual contrast, which predicts that acting inconsistently with

¹ The only other measure assessed perceptions of the organization’s entitativity – i.e., the extent to which it seems like a cohesive, unitary whole (Campbell, 1958). This measure came before the second article, and did not significantly moderate the results.

² We also tested an alternative mediation model in which the causal order of hypocrisy and condemnation was reversed. Although the indirect effect in this model was significant, $b = .08 [.02, .14]$, it left a substantial amount of variance in the total effect of the manipulation unexplained (82%). By contrast, no variance in the total effect was left unexplained in the hypothesized mediation model. Thus, hypocrisy mediated the manipulation’s effect on condemnation better than condemnation mediated the manipulation’s effect on hypocrisy.

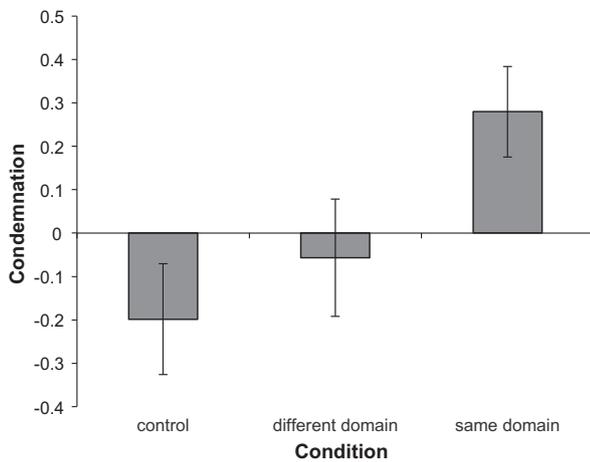


Fig. 1. Mean condemnation (\pm SE) by condition in Study 1. *Note:* Each item in the condemnation measure was standardized before being averaged into the composite.

any organization's values would produce the effect. As in Study 1, participants read about an employee whose transgression was or was not inconsistent with his organization's values. This time, we also varied whether the employee was an executive at this same organization (*associated executive* condition) or an executive at a different organization (*unassociated executive* condition). A perceptual contrast mechanism predicts an inconsistency penalty in both conditions, whereas a hypocrisy-by-association effect predicts that it will only emerge in the associated-executive condition.

Study 2's third goal was to test H3: that the hypocrisy-by-association effect will emerge for both higher- and lower-level employees, but that it will be stronger for those at higher levels. Thus, we included a condition in which the member was a non-executive accountant at the organization whose values were described (*accountant associated* condition).

To summarize, Study 2 had a 3 (same-domain vs. different-domain vs. control) \times 3 (associated executive vs. unassociated executive vs. associated accountant) factorial design.

3.1. Method

3.1.1. Participants

We aimed to recruit 60 people per condition – more than in Study 1 because we expected the predicted interaction to require greater statistical power to detect than Study 1's main effect. Five hundred thirty-three participants from MTurk began the study and received \$.51 each. We could not analyze the responses from

19 participants because of missing data, and, as in Study 1, we excluded 7 participants with duplicate or non-US IP addresses, and 64 participants who failed at least one of four attention-checks (described below). The final sample thus contained 443 people (270 males and 173 females; $M_{\text{age}} = 31$ years, $SD = 12$). The direction and significance of the results were identical when we instead retained the excluded data.

3.1.2. Materials and manipulation

As in Study 1, participants read two newspaper articles (see Appendix B, Online Supplement). This time, the first article described an organization that consulted to law-enforcement agencies, and whose values were strongly opposed to either sex trafficking or drug trafficking. The article stated that the organization “has made the crusade to eliminate [drug/sex] trafficking the cornerstone of its organizational mission statement,” described the anti-trafficking efforts and how they had been successful, and noted that dedication to the organization's mission “is apparent among rank-and-file employees.”

The second article described a male employee (the target person) who had been arrested on charges of either drug possession or soliciting a prostitute. (The first article made no mention of this employee.) In both cases, the employee indicated through a lawyer that he would not dispute the charges against him. The materials made it clear that the employee had committed the transgression after being hired by the organization, but a few days before his start date. Thus, the test of the hypocrisy-by-association effect was particularly conservative because, although the employee had already accepted membership in the relevant organization when he transgressed, he had not been associated with it for long and was hence unlikely to have begun promoting the organization's values himself. In other words, it was the organization that preached the values, not the target person.

As in Study 1, we combined the articles so that the transgression was either related or unrelated to what the organization opposed (i.e., *same-domain* vs. *different-domain* conditions). We also included a control condition in which, in contrast to Study 1, participants did not read a first article. Orthogonally, we manipulated the target's organizational association: He was either an executive vice president at “The TaylorGroup,” the consulting firm described in the first article (*associated-executive* condition), an accountant at that firm (*associated-accountant* condition), or an executive vice president at “Edwards and Ross,” a different consulting firm (*unassociated-executive* condition). The first article was always realistically formatted to appear as if it were from the San Jose *Mercury News*; in the two *associated* conditions, the second article appeared to be from the same newspaper, whereas in the *unassociated* condition, it appeared to be from the Portland

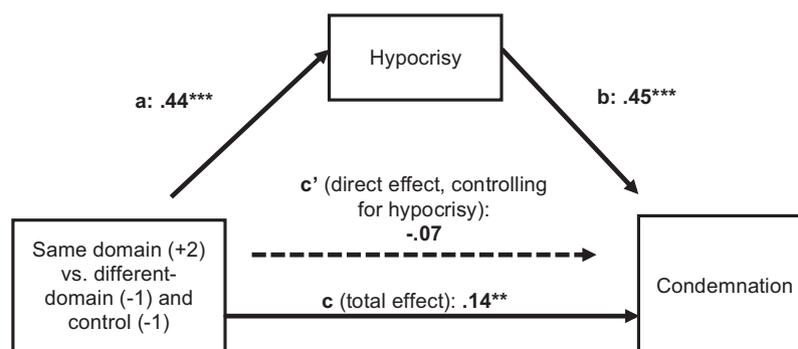


Fig. 2. Perceptions of hypocrisy mediated the inconsistency penalty in Study 1. *Note:* Values are path coefficients. Solid lines show significant paths; dotted lines are non-significant paths. Hypocrisy was standardized for these analyses. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Tribune to emphasize that the two articles described different organizations in different locales.

3.1.3. Measures

Participants completed the filler items, condemnation scale ($\alpha = .93$), and the measures of hypocrisy and harm from Study 1. (We did not administer the item from the condemnation scale that asked about whether the target person should resign, because it showed the weakest intra-scale correlation in Study 1.) Multiple-choice attention-checks asked participants to recall the target person's job, the name of his organization, the city where he worked, and the transgression he had committed – information that the articles had made highly salient.³

3.2. Results

The manipulations affected condemnation as expected (see Fig. 3). A 3 (domain: same vs. different vs. control) \times 3 (job: associated executive vs. unassociated executive vs. associated accountant) ANOVA revealed a main effect of domain, $F(2,434) = 15.62$, $p < .001$, no main effect of job, $F(2,434) = 1.78$, $p = .17$ and, crucially, the predicted interaction, $F(4,434) = 4.73$, $p = .001$. (Additional analyses showed that these results were not moderated by whether the specific transgression was related to sex or drugs, $p = .97$.) To understand this interaction, we tested simple effects of the domain manipulation for each job.

Conceptually replicating Study 1's results and supporting H1, the executive who was associated with the relevant organization received more condemnation in the same-domain condition (coded +2, $M = .54$, $SD = .66$) than in the other two conditions (each coded -1) $F(1,434) = 38.91$, $p < .0001$, $d = 1.16$ – an inconsistency penalty. The orthogonal contrast showed no difference between the different-domain condition (coded +1; $M = -.20$, $SD = .65$) and the control condition (coded -1 ; $M = -.20$, $SD = .69$; same-domain condition coded 0), $F(1,434) = .00$, $p = .98$, $d < .01$.

Extending Study 1, the results did not support a perceptual contrast mechanism. The executive who was unassociated with the relevant organization received no more condemnation in the same-domain condition ($M = -.08$, $SD = .76$) than in the other two conditions, $F(1,434) = .02$, $p = .90$, $d = .02$, which did not differ from each other either ($M_{\text{different-domain}} = -.07$, $SD = .70$; $M_{\text{control}} = -.12$, $SD = .63$), $F(1,434) = .16$, $p = .69$, $d = .21$. Thus, to elicit an inconsistency penalty, it was not sufficient to expose participants to any organization's values; the transgressor had to be associated with that organization.

Further extending Study 1's results, the data also showed an inconsistency penalty for the accountant who was associated with the relevant organization. That is, people expressed more condemnation in the same-domain condition ($M = .29$, $SD = .68$) than in the other two conditions, $F(1,434) = 10.79$, $p = .001$, $d = .57$. No differences emerged between the different-domain condition ($M = -.02$, $SD = .70$), and the control condition ($M = -.17$, $SD = .65$), $F(1,434) = 1.12$, $p = .29$, $d = .22$. As predicted, the effect of the same-domain condition for the associated accountant was significantly smaller than it was for the associated executive, $F(1,434) = 4.43$, $p = .04$, in a contrast analysis that coded the same-domain, different-domain, and control conditions as, respectively, +2, -1 , and -1 in the executive-same condition, and -2 , +1, and +1 in the accountant-same condition. Thus, supporting H3, people's judgments showed a reliable inconsistency penalty

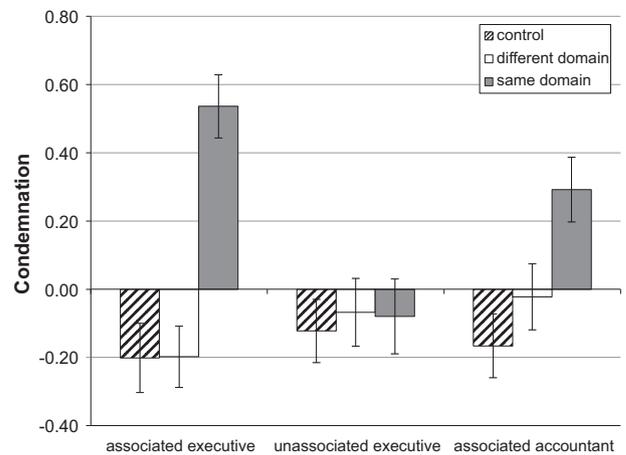


Fig. 3. Mean condemnation (\pm SE) by domain and employee association in Study 2. Note: Each item in the condemnation measure was standardized before being averaged into the composite.

regardless of whether the target person was higher or lower in the organizational hierarchy, but this penalty was significantly harsher when the target person was higher.

3.2.1. Mediation by hypocrisy

The results thus far demonstrate that people levied an inconsistency penalty when an executive's transgression contradicted his organizations' values and a weaker (but still significant) penalty when an accountant's transgression contradicted them, but no such penalty when an executive's transgression contradicted an unrelated organization's values. Were these inconsistency penalties mediated by ascriptions of hypocrisy? To find out, we standardized hypocrisy, coded the same-domain, different-domain, and control conditions as +2, -1 , and -1 , respectively, and conducted mediation analyses separately in the executive-associated and accountant-associated conditions (i.e., the two conditions that showed an inconsistency penalty). As predicted, hypocrisy was a significant mediator in both conditions, $b_s = .24$ [.17, .31] and .18 [.12, .25], respectively, for the indirect effects and their bias-corrected, bootstrapped 95% CIs (see Fig. 4).⁴ These mediated pathways remained significant when we statistically controlled for perceptions that the target person's actions had harmed the organization.

3.3. Discussion

Study 2 replicated the hypocrisy-by-association effect (H1 and H2), indicated that it cannot be explained by perceptual contrast or concerns about harm to the organization, and showed that it was stronger for a newly-hired person with a high rank in the organization's hierarchy although it also emerged significantly for a newly-hired person with a lower rank (H3). Along with Study 1, Study 2 showed that observers will condemn an individual more for the exact same transgression when it contradicts values promoted by his organization. In other words, employees incurred a

³ The only other measures were exploratory: After participants read the first article (but before they read about the target person's transgression), they rated the organization and its average employee on a variety of dimensions (results showed that participants viewed both positively) and answered free response questions about the target person.

⁴ As in Study 1, we also tested a mediation model that reversed the causal order of hypocrisy and condemnation. This model was significant for the executive-association and the accountant-association conditions, $b = .15$ [.10, .21] and $b = .08$ [.04, .14], respectively. However, as in Study 1, the indirect effects in these models left a substantial amount of the variance in the total effect of the manipulation unexplained (76% and 82% in the two conditions). By contrast, the hypothesized model left only 1% of the variance in the total effect unexplained in the executive-associated condition and 0% in the accountant-associated condition. Thus, hypocrisy again mediated the manipulation's effect on condemnation better than condemnation mediated the manipulation's effect on hypocrisy.

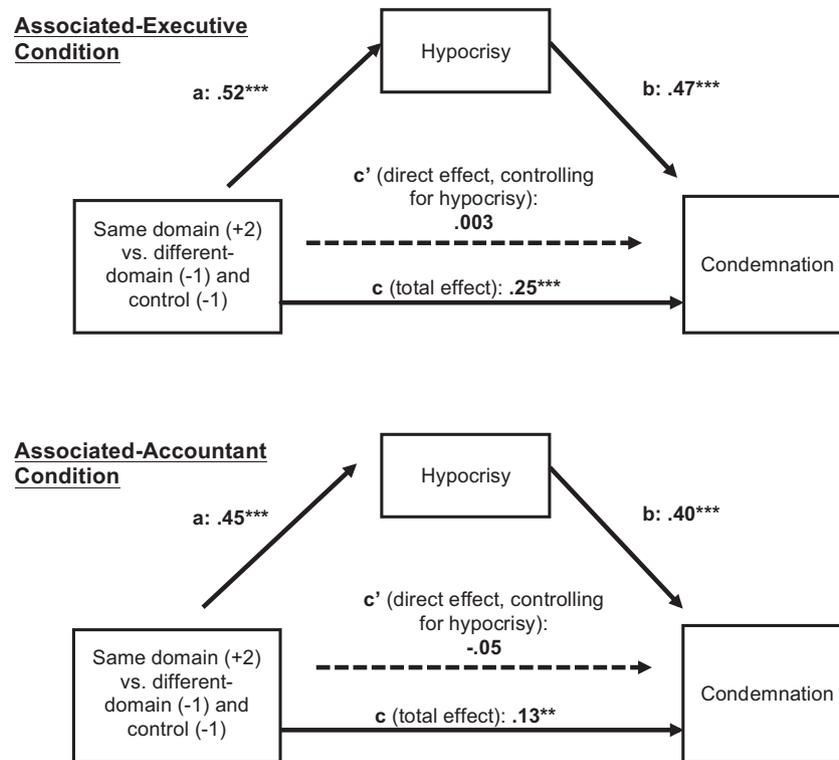


Fig. 4. Perceptions of hypocrisy mediated the inconsistency penalty in Study 2. Note: Values are path coefficients. Hypocrisy was standardized for this analysis. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

hypocrisy penalty for failing to practice what their organization preached.

4. Study 3

Studies 1 and 2 provided conservative tests of the hypocrisy-by-association effect by describing employees whose status as new hires made them only weakly associated with the organization and unlikely to have preached the organization's values themselves (particularly in Study 2 in which the employees had been hired but had not yet begun their job). Study 3 examined whether the hypocrisy-by-association effect would generalize to an employee with longer tenure. We also assessed robustness by administering an improved, multi-item measure of hypocrisy, and recruiting participants from a different population.

4.1. Method

4.1.1. Participants

We advertised the study to a university-managed, online participant pool that recruits individuals across America with ads on popular websites. Participants received a chance to win a \$50 gift card. As in Study 2, we aimed to recruit 60 people per cell; 145 began the study; 130 provided sufficient data to analyze, and we excluded 16 people for failing at least one of four attention-checks (described below). The final sample thus contained 114 people (34 males and 80 females; $M_{\text{age}} = 40$ years, $SD = 14$). The direction and significance of the results were identical when we instead retained the excluded data, except that the marginally significant finding reported below became significant at $p = .01$.

4.1.2. Materials

Participants read the news articles in Study 2's associated-executive condition about an employee who worked

for either an anti-sex-trafficking or an anti-drug-trafficking organization, and who was arrested for either drug possession or soliciting a prostitute. In a departure from our previous studies, the second article described the employee as having worked for the organization for "over 10 years." As in previous studies, we combined the articles so that the transgression was either related or unrelated to what the organization opposed (i.e., *same-domain* vs. *different-domain* conditions). There was no control condition.

4.1.3. Measures

Participants completed the filler items and condemnation scale from Study 2 ($\alpha = .92$), and a new, 5-item hypocrisy measure that asked them how much they agreed or disagreed that the employee is "a hypocrite," "two-faced," "phony," "genuine," and "insincere" (7-point scales from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*, with *unsure/neutral* as the midpoint; $\alpha = .92$). Participants also completed Study 2's multiple-choice attention checks.⁵

4.2. Results

Supporting H1, participants expressed more condemnation in the same-domain condition ($M = .13$, $SD = .69$) than in the different-domain condition ($M = -.13$, $SD = .70$) – a marginally significant inconsistency penalty, $t(112) = 1.96$, $p = .052$, $d = .37$. Additional analyses showed that the particular transgression committed (i.e., drug use vs. sexual harassment) did not significantly moderate these results, $p = .22$.

To test whether the new 5-item hypocrisy measure would mediate this inconsistency penalty, we coded the same-domain condition as 1 and the different-domain condition as 0, we standardized hypocrisy, and we computed the bias-corrected, bootstrapped 95% CI for the indirect effect using 5000 resamples (Preacher & Hayes, 2004). As shown in Fig. 5, the results showed

⁵ The only other measures were the exploratory items described in Footnote 3.

significant mediation, $b = .55$ [.35, .78] for the indirect effect.⁶ Thus, Study 3's results again supported a hypocrisy-by-association effect (H1 and H2) with an expanded hypocrisy measure in a different subject pool, and demonstrated that the effect can generalize to judgments of employees with substantial organizational tenure.

5. Study 4

Study 4's goals were to examine potential downstream consequences of the hypocrisy-by-association effect for hiring decisions, and to provide a particularly conservative test by focusing on a situation in which the relevant association was quite weak. Participants completed a laboratory task that simulated a hiring decision made by committee. To make the task engaging and impactful (i.e., to increase experimental realism; Ellsworth, Aronson, Carlsmith, & Gonzales, 1990), participants were told that their responses would influence a real hiring process. They evaluated a target person who once held a summer internship at a marketing firm, where he had been assigned to work on an ad campaign promoting a specific value. Later, the target had committed a minor transgression. In addition to measuring how participants judged the target's morality and competence, we included a behavioral measure: whether participants chose the target from among other applicants to recommend for the job. In line with H1, we expected people to view him less favorably when the value he transgressed had been promoted by his organization than when it had not been. Study 4's hypothesis test was particularly conservative because his association with the organization was short, in the past, tenuous (i.e., interns may not be considered full-fledged members), and apparently non-diagnostic of his personal values – and because the values that the marketing firm preached through advertisements were not obviously integral values to the firm itself.

5.1. Method

5.1.1. Participants

Undergraduates at an American research university were compensated \$5 each. Informed by the results of Studies 1 and 2, we aimed to run 80 participants (i.e., 40 people per cell), but we scheduled more to guard against no-shows. Ninety participants completed the study ($M_{\text{age}} = 20.44$, $SD = 1.79$; 26 men, 64 women), and we excluded two who completed the tasks in the wrong order, leaving 88 for analysis. (The direction and significance of the results were identical when we retained the excluded participants.)

5.1.2. Procedure and materials

Participants came to the lab in groups of five to eleven and sat at private computer terminals. The instructions explained that the researchers were harnessing the “wisdom of crowds” to inform an upcoming hiring decision for an undergraduate research-assistant job. Participants learned that they would rate three applications from a larger pool of applicants and that their ratings would factor into the actual hiring decision. The task was thus similar to hiring decisions made by committees or departments in which each member independently evaluates the candidates and provides a hiring recommendation. In actuality, participants all rated the same three applications, which we created to implement our manipulations. Participants received a packet containing the ostensible job posting, which listed

responsibilities including running studies and entering data; a list of characteristics of good research assistants (i.e., detail-oriented, reliable, and trustworthy); and the applications, on which candidates had ostensibly hand-written answers to questions about their major, GPA, courses taken, and so forth. The candidates' names had been redacted and their gender was unspecified. (In describing the methods and results, we arbitrarily refer to the candidates with masculine pronouns.) To increase realism, the hand-writing on each application was visibly different. (The [Online Supplement](#) contains all materials in [Appendix C](#).)

5.1.3. Same- vs. different-domain manipulation

The first and third candidates served as decoys. We manipulated information on the second candidate's application to create the same- and different-domain conditions. In response to a question about relevant work experience, the target candidate wrote that two summers ago, he had interned at a marketing firm. Depending on condition, his manager had assigned him to work on a campaign that was either opposed to underage drinking or that promoted safe driving. Later in the application, the candidates were required to note if they had ever received a citation from local or campus police. Only the target candidate answered affirmatively, indicating that he had been cited two months earlier. We manipulated whether the citation was for a transgression related to underage drinking (i.e., “buying liquor with a fake ID”) or related to reckless driving (i.e., hitting a stop sign and running over a bike because he was texting while driving). We combined the 2 (campaign: underage drinking vs. reckless driving) \times 2 (transgression: underage drinking vs. reckless driving) factorial design to create a *same-domain* condition in which the target candidate was cited for the same behavior that the ad campaign had opposed, and a *different-domain* condition, in which he was cited for an unrelated behavior.

We expected the hypocrisy-by-association effect to be strong enough that it would reduce how favorably people evaluated even a well-qualified job candidate. We thus designed the materials so that the target candidate would have the most competitive qualifications for the job. Specifically, compared to the other two candidates, he had a higher GPA (i.e., 3.7 vs. 3.4 and 3.1), he majored in a subject that was arguably more relevant to the job responsibility of running laboratory studies (i.e., psychology vs. economics and sociology), and in response to a question about fit with the position, he most clearly communicated that he was reliable and detail-oriented. Thus, we expected that participants would tend to prefer the target candidate to the other two in the different-domain condition, and that the same-domain condition would weaken this preference.

Several other features of these materials made our test of the hypocrisy-by-association effect conservative. As noted, the internship that the target candidate had completed gave him only a low-level, past association with the relevant organization. The nature of his work on the ad campaign did not require preaching or endorsing the relevant value; instead, he simply “helped to analyze the effectiveness of past campaigns and entered survey data.” Moreover, it was doubtful that this work was diagnostic of the candidate's attitudes toward underage drinking or safe-driving: He wrote that he had applied to the marketing firm “because [he] knew it would be challenging and give [him] good marketing experience,” and that after he arrived he had been assigned to work on the relevant campaign. Finally, there was no indication that the marketing firm had promoted the value outside of the context of the ad campaign. We expected that even this tenuous and temporary association with the promoted value would lead him to receive more negative evaluations in the same-domain condition than in the different-domain condition.

⁶ As in Study 1, reversing the causal order of hypocrisy and condemnation also resulted in a significant indirect effect, $b = .38$ [.01, .75], but one that left some variance in the total effect unexplained (7%). By contrast, the hypothesized model left 0% of the variance unexplained. Thus, hypocrisy mediated the manipulation's effect on condemnation slightly better than condemnation mediated the manipulation's effect on hypocrisy.

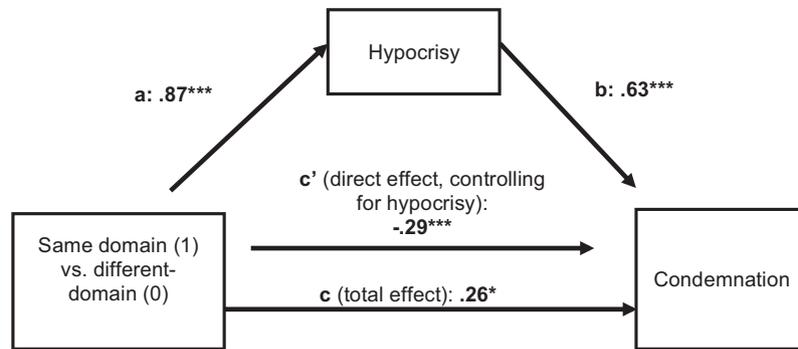


Fig. 5. Perceptions of hypocrisy mediated the inconsistency penalty in Study 3. Note: Values are path coefficients. Hypocrisy was standardized for these analyses. * $p < .05$. *** $p < .001$.

Table 1

Ratings of the target candidate by domain condition in Study 4. Analyses control for decoy candidate ratings.

Measure	Domain condition				M diff.	95% CI	F	p	d
	Same (n = 45)		Different (n = 43)						
	M	SD	M	SD					
Moral character	3.21	0.79	3.55	0.79	-0.34	[-0.67, -0.01]	3.98	0.049	0.43
Competence	3.69	0.64	4.16	0.64	-0.47	[-0.74, -0.20]	11.37	0.001	0.73
Willingness to hire	-0.12	0.88	0.11	0.88	-0.23	[-0.60, 0.14]	1.48	0.227	0.26
Recommended salary	19.56	3.02	21.14	3.02	-1.58	[-2.86, -0.30]	6.01	0.016	0.52
Evaluation composite	-0.19	0.70	0.20	0.71	-0.39	[-0.69, -0.09]	6.62	0.012	0.55

Note: Values are estimated marginal means after adjusting for ratings of the decoy candidates. The items in the *Willingness to Hire* measure and the *Ratings Composite* were standardized to account for response scale differences. All tests have (1,84) dfs.

5.1.4. Candidate evaluations

Participants evaluated each candidate by responding to 14 questions that assessed four dimensions. Four items measured *moral character* (full of integrity, honest, trustworthy ethical; 1 = *not at all* to 5 = *extremely*; $\alpha = .86$), five items measured *competence* (detail-oriented, hard-working, diligent, reliable, dependable; 1 = *not at all* to 5 = *extremely*; $\alpha = .89$), four items measured *willingness to hire* each candidate (“This candidate is well-suited for the job” and “It would be entirely appropriate to hire this candidate,” 1 = *disagree strongly*, 7 = *agree strongly*; desire to work with the candidate, 1 = *not at all*, 5 = *extremely*; hiring recommendation, 1 = *definitely do not hire*, 5 = *definitely hire*; $\alpha = .90$; these four items were standardized before averaging to account for different response scales). Finally, participants recommended a *starting salary* (scale ranged from \$15 to \$30 per hour, in \$1 increments).

Ratings of the target candidate were a dependent measure; we used ratings of the other candidates as covariates. To avoid raising suspicions about our cover story, we did not measure perceptions of hypocrisy or harm.

5.1.5. Open-ended questions

After participants rated a candidate, open-ended questions asked them (a) to note whether they had any specific reservations about him that should be reviewed further, and (b) to describe him briefly. Three coders, blind to hypothesis and condition, indicated whether each participant’s written response to the first question mentioned the police citation, and whether the response to the second question indicated anything negative about the candidate. All three coders agreed on more than 94% of responses to each question; when they disagreed, we used the code selected by the majority.

5.1.6. Behavioral measure: candidate selection

We also asked participants to select one of the three candidates to recommend for the job. We coded whether they selected the target candidate (1 = yes, 0 = no).

Finally, participants completed a funneled debrief that included an open ended question about whether they thought anything was “strange or unusual about the study.” Seven participants indicated suspicion that the applications or the hiring decision may not be real. However, removing these participants did not change the interpretation of any results, so we retained them in our analyses.

5.2. Results and discussion

Table 1 displays results for each dimension on which participants rated the target candidate. To reduce error variance, our analyses controlled for ratings of the two decoy candidates.⁷ In the same-domain condition (compared to the different-domain condition), participants rated the target candidate as significantly less moral ($p = .049$, $d = .43$) and competent ($p = .001$, $d = .73$), and they recommended a significantly lower starting salary ($p = .016$, $d = .52$). They did not express significantly less willingness to hire him, however ($p = .227$, $d = .26$). A composite of all items in these measures (standardized to account for different response options; $\alpha = .94$) revealed that participants evaluated the target significantly less positively in the same-domain condition than in the different-domain condition, $p = .012$, $d = .55$.

The coding of responses to the open-ended questions yielded convergent results. More than three times as many people described the target candidate negatively in the same-domain condition than in the different-domain condition (respectively, 26.67% or 12/45 vs. 6.98% of 3/43), $\chi^2(1, N = 88) = 6.03$, $p = .014$. Additionally, nearly twice as many people spontaneously mentioned the police citation as cause for concern in the

⁷ Ratings of the decoy candidate who was examined after the target candidate did not differ significantly between conditions, $ps > .15$, and could thus be used as covariates. Results were identical in direction and significance with no covariates, except that the manipulation’s effect on salary recommendations went from significant to marginally significant, $t(85) = 1.76$, $p = .082$.

same-domain condition than in the different-domain condition (respectively, 78.05% or 32/41 vs. 42.11% or 16/38), $\chi^2(1, N = 79) = 10.69, p < .001$. (Five people in the same-domain condition and four people in the different-domain condition did not provide a response and were thus not included in this analysis.)

Finally, as predicted, significantly more participants chose the target candidate for the job in the different-domain condition (77% or 33/43) than they did in the same-domain condition (47% or 21/45) $\chi^2(1, N = 88) = 8.39, p = .004$. Thus, although as noted, the manipulation's effect on how willing people initially said they were to hire the target candidate was not significant, its ultimate effect on their behavior – i.e., their choice of whether to recommend him for the job over the other candidates – was significant. The specific transgression (i.e., underage drinking vs. reckless driving) did not significantly moderate any of these results, $ps > .11$.

The results suggest that the hypocrisy-by-association effect can have significant downstream consequences. Not only was the target candidate judged more negatively when his transgression contradicted a value promoted by his previous employer, but participants were also significantly less likely to select him as their top candidate. Thus, prior acts of hypocrisy-by-association may tarnish people's image and reputation and even reduce their future job prospects. The results are particularly striking because the target candidate's association with the relevant organization was short, tenuous, and in the past, and the application information made it doubtful that the association was diagnostic of his personal values. Also, although the organization preached the relevant values through an ad campaign, they were not central to its core mission as a marketing firm. Yet people levied a clear inconsistency penalty against the candidate. Consistent with H3, the effect emerged even though the candidate had been extremely low in the organizational hierarchy (i.e., a summer intern). Although we did not directly measure hypocrisy and harm, we suggest that a minor infraction (e.g., texting while driving) committed by a former intern could cause little harm to the marketing firm; instead, we suggest that the target was penalized for hypocrisy-by-association: for falling short of the values his former employer had preached through its campaigns.

6. General discussion

Not all employees will uphold all organizational values all the time. The present research suggests, however, that employees are seen as morally obligated to act consistently with these values, even by people outside the organization – and that they are penalized when they fail to do so. Our experiments are the first to demonstrate the hypocrisy-by-association effect, by which the same transgression receives harsher condemnation when it contradicts values promoted by the transgressor's organization than when it does not. For example, an accountant was judged more harshly for substance abuse when he crunched numbers at an anti-drug organization than when he did so at an anti-sex-trafficking organization. To be perceived as a hypocrite, it is not necessary to fail to practice what you preach; instead, your practicing merely needs to be inconsistent with what your organization preaches.

Being perceived as a hypocrite-by-association can have severe consequences for employees. When employees in our studies could seem like hypocrites-by-association, they were rated as less moral, less competent, deserving of harsher punishment, meriting lower starting salaries, and they were less likely to be recommended for a job – effects that our data estimate are moderate to large in size. For example, the condemnation an executive received for committing a transgression was an average of .71 standard deviations higher⁸ when he worked for an organization that preached

against that type of transgression than when he did not, even though he committed the exact same transgression in both cases (Studies 1–3). Even having a weak association with an organization and its values appears sufficient to be condemned as a hypocrite-by-association. In Study 4, for example, a job applicant was only associated with the relevant value because, during a summer intern position he once held, his manager had assigned him to enter data for an ad campaign related to the value and to analyze past campaigns' effectiveness. Nonetheless, this association was sufficient to reduce his chances of being recommended for a job by 39%. The hypocrisy-by-association effect emerged across a variety of specific transgressions (i.e., related to sexual harassment, drug and alcohol use, and reckless driving), when the organization member committed the transgression after joining the organization but before starting work (Study 2), soon after starting work (Study 1), after working there for 10 years (Study 3), or two years after the employment relationship had ended (Study 4), and regardless of whether the member was an executive, an accountant, or a summer intern (Studies 1–4). Together, these results demonstrate that the hypocrisy-by-association effect is robust, moderate to large in size, emerges even when the relevant association is weak, and can meaningfully impact people's perceptions, judgments, and hiring decisions.

6.1. Organizational membership as a moral prescription

It is often reasonable to assume that employees share their organization's values (e.g., Cable & Judge, 1996). Importantly, however, the mere assumption that someone holds a particular value cannot fully explain why moral judgments of employees contain a “hypocrisy penalty” when employee transgressions violate organizational values. Just because you assume that someone holds a particular value does not mean that you will condemn her when she acts inconsistently with it. For example, observing someone eat tofu may lead you to assume that she values vegetarianism, but you would have little basis for condemning her as a hypocrite if you later saw her eating steak; instead, you would likely just revise your initial assumption and conclude that she is a carnivore who happens to like tofu. Hypocrites are people who transgress values that they are perceived to have endorsed or promoted. Thus, you might condemn the tofu eater's steak-eating as hypocritical if she had publicly promoted vegetarianism. Our research suggests that observers treat organizational membership as more analogous to promoting vegetarianism than to eating tofu. That is, they act as if employment is a kind of preaching, or an implicit endorsement of values that the organization has promoted – even if the employee did not explicitly endorse the values or literally preach them himself. Thus, a key contribution of our studies is to show that a person's organizational membership does not merely signal the values that she is likely to hold, but also prescribes the values that she *should* uphold.

6.2. Alternative explanations

Our studies found direct, meditational evidence that ascriptions of hypocrisy could indeed account for the hypocrisy-by-association effect. The results also cast doubt on two alternative explanations. First, we found no evidence that perceptual contrast could explain the hypocrisy-by-association effect. Simply priming people with the values of one organization did not increase their condemnation of an employee at a different organization who violated those values. Second, the idea that an employee's transgressions seemed more harmful to the organization when they contradicted its values was also insufficient to explain the hypocrisy-by-association effect. Studies 1 and 2 found that ascriptions of hypocrisy

⁸ $d = .71$ is the average effect size in the executive-same conditions of Studies 1–3, weighted by the variance of each effect size (Turner & Bernard, 2006).

continued to mediate the effect of the manipulation on condemnation even after perceptions of harmfulness were statistically controlled.

Perhaps presumed knowledge or expertise plays a role in the hypocrisy-by-association effect. For example, an employee of a pro-environment organization could be expected to be particularly knowledgeable about the virtues of recycling. As a result, he could receive more condemnation than an employee at a different organization for failing to recycle because “he should know better.” However, we do not think that this possibility can explain our results because they emerged even when the target people were novices (e.g., newly-hired employees, interns) who presumably did not yet have expertise in the relevant domain. We also tested this explanation in an additional study and found no support. The relevant conditions of this study were similar to the associated-accountant condition of Study 2. MTurk participants read about an organization that campaigned against either racial discrimination or sexual harassment, and also about how the director of accounting had committed either racial discrimination or sexual harassment.⁹ Consistent with our previous studies, participants condemned the director marginally more in the same-domain condition ($M = .11$, $SD = .67$, $n = 56$) than in the different-domain condition ($M = -.16$, $SD = .82$, $n = 58$), $t(112) = 1.92$, $p = .058$, $d = .36$ – an effect that was significantly mediated by Study 1 and 2’s hypocrisy measure, $b = .21$ [.08, .40]. We also asked participants how much they agreed or disagreed that the director “should have known better” than to commit his transgression. This measure did not differ significantly between conditions, (same-domain: $M = 6.36$, $SD = 1.12$; different-domain: $M = 6.11$, $SD = 1.20$), $t(112) = 1.17$, $p = .24$, it did not correlate significantly with perceptions of hypocrisy, $r(114) = .14$, $p = .14$, and controlling for it did not eliminate the mediated pathway through hypocrisy $b = .18$, [.06, .35]. It remains possible that associating with organizations can make a person seem hypocritical by making it seem like they “should have known better” than to transgress, but our studies suggest that the hypocrisy-by-association effect can occur in the absence of this mechanism.

6.3. Theoretical and applied implications

Our results expand existing theories of hypocrisy. Philosophers have long debated how hypocrisy should be defined, but little research has examined what lay people think constitutes hypocrisy (Alicke, Gordon, & Rose, 2013). Most psychological research on judgments of hypocrisy has focused on situations in which individuals explicitly espouse certain moral values, or urge others to uphold such values – and then fail to uphold these values themselves (Barden et al., 2005; Effron & Monin, 2010; Gilbert & Jones, 1986; Powell & Smith, 2012). Taxonomies of hypocrisy have similarly highlighted the central role of making insincere claims about one’s moral values, with some scholars arguing that hypocrisy can also occur when people judge others’ moral behavior more harshly than their own, or when they perform token acts of morality while eschewing more effortful moral acts (Crisp & Cowton, 1994; Graham, Meindl, Koleva, Iyer, & Johnson, 2015; Hale & Pillow, 2015; Monin & Merritt, 2012). The hypocrisy-by-association effect suggests that lay people’s perceptions of hypocrisy are broader than has previously been demonstrated. Explicitly endorsing or promoting a value is not necessary to elicit condemnation as a hypocrite. Instead, it can be sufficient to contradict the values that one’s group has promoted.

More broadly, our results contribute to research on how group membership affects social judgments. Previous research demonstrates how people receive negative judgments for being associated with social groups that are stigmatized, negatively stereotyped, or responsible for wrongdoing (Darley & Gross, 1983; Denson, Lickel, Curtis, Stenstrom, & Ames, 2006; Neuberg, Smith, Hoffman, & Russell, 1994; Zemba, Young, & Morris, 2006). In our research, people faced more condemnation for the same transgression based on their group membership, but this was presumably not because the group was viewed negatively – after all, the groups in the present studies were organizations that promoted a particular value (see also Footnote 3). Instead, it was the inconsistency between an individual’s transgressions and the group’s values that led the individuals to receive negative judgments. Thus, we demonstrate a novel way in which group membership can make individuals vulnerable to negative social judgments: by making them seem like hypocrites if they fail to uphold group values.

Our theorizing sheds new light on how people think about employment relationships. Previous scholarship has emphasized that many employees come to see their organizational membership as a central part of their identity (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Elsbach & Kramer, 1996), but less work has examined how such membership is interpreted by people outside the organization – individuals who might learn of an employee transgression by reading a newspaper, serving on a jury, or interviewing the employee for a new job. We have argued that these individuals act as if being a member of an organization were tantamount to implicitly endorsing its values. In this way, organizational membership can seem like more than an identity; it can seem like a moral stance that one is obligated to uphold.

The hypocrisy-by-association effect has important implications for organizations and their members. When managers seem hypocritical because of inconsistencies between their words and deeds at work, they undermine employee trust, commitment, performance, and ethical behavior (Davis & Rothstein, 2006; Dineen et al., 2006; Greenbaum et al., 2015; Leroy et al., 2012; Palanski & Yammarino, 2007; Peterson, 2004; Simons, 2002). Our findings demonstrate that individual managers can appear hypocritical even when their behavior outside of work is inconsistent with the values that their organization promotes. Indeed, although our participants penalized both leaders and non-leaders for hypocrisy-by-association, this effect was particularly strong for leaders, whose elevated position may seem like more of an implicit endorsement of the organization’s values (Study 2). These findings suggest that organizations should perhaps be particularly vigilant about whether the values of prospective managers are congruent with the values the organization promotes.

Our results also have important implications for job seekers who may have reasons for wanting to join an organization that are unrelated to its values (e.g., salary, prestige). When people join organizations, they may unwittingly endorse a set of values by which even people outside the organization will judge them. We would predict that a failure to uphold those values could do lasting damage to one’s reputation and diminish one’s future job prospects.

6.4. Future directions

We see several promising avenues for future research into the hypocrisy-by-association effect. Our studies examined judgments of employees whose transgressions contradicted their organizations’ values. How would people judge employees who do “good deeds” that contradict their organizations’ values? For example, would employees be judged as hypocrites-by-association if they spent their weekends working on anti-smoking campaigns despite working for a tobacco company, volunteering for a gambling-addiction hotline despite working for a casino, or

⁹ They also read information about his job application: a cover letter that expressed enthusiasm about the firm’s accounting challenges, and a transcript of a conversation between two managers who indicated a willingness to hire him despite not knowing how much he cared about the organization’s values.

attending anti-war protests despite working for a weapons manufacturer? The answer is unclear, particularly because previous research on hypocrisy focuses exclusively on people's failures to practice the positive – and not the negative – values they preach (Graham et al., in press; Hale & Pillow, 2015; Monin & Merritt, 2012).

The organizations in all our studies preached to an external audience. For example, the marketing firm in Study 4 ran a safe-driving campaign, and the consulting group in Study 1 worked with schools to reduce drug abuse. However, organizations sometimes only promote values internally. For example, a firm may value diversity, but not preach about it outside the organization. We suspect that the hypocrisy-by-association effect will be particularly strong when organizations preach to external audiences. By analogy, someone who fails to practice the values that she publicly preaches is more hypocritical than someone who fails to practice the values that she just privately endorses. We also suspect, however, that the hypocrisy-by-association effect still emerges even when organizations only promote values internally. Working for an organization with a pro-diversity stance, for example, could be construed as an implicit endorsement of diversity. Future research should test these speculations.

Our studies focused on evaluations of employees, judgments of their transgressions, and potential consequences for their careers. A related question is how public reactions to individual hypocrites-by-association affect organizational outcomes, such as reputation, sales, and share prices. For example, our studies suggest that the Greenpeace employee who faced condemnation for commuting a short distance by plane (Davies, 2014) would have been more likely to be let off the hook if he had not worked for Greenpeace, but to what extent do people think that his choice of transit reflects negatively on Greenpeace as an organization? In other words, does harboring a hypocrite-by-association tarnish an organization's reputation? Future research should examine how inconsistencies between organizational values and employee behavior affect firm-level outcomes.

Our participants were from an individualistic/independent culture (America); future work should examine the hypocrisy-by-association effect in more collectivistic/interdependent cultures, such as those in East Asia. On the one hand, research suggests that judgments of hypocrisy are harsher in independent compared to interdependent cultures (Effron, Szczurek, Markus, Muramoto, & Muluk, 2015). On the other hand, judgments of hypocrisy-by-association could be harsher in interdependent cultures, in which individuals may be seen as more responsible for upholding the standards of the group (cf. Zemba et al., 2006).

6.5. Conclusion

Failing to practice what you preach invites ascriptions of hypocrisy. The present research suggests that failing to practice what your organization preaches can do the same, thereby increasing the condemnation, reputational costs, and punishment you incur for wrongdoing.

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Appendix A. Supplementary material

Supplementary data associated with this article can be found, in the online version, at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.obhdp.2015.05.001>.

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