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Hypocrisy, Emotion, and Belief Alignment: Betrayal May Drive Moral Judgement

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Abstract

The present research is an exploratory study to investigate how hypocrisy impacts emotions and how pre-existing moral beliefs influence emotional and moral reactions to hypocrisy, factors that have received little attention in previous research. We gave participants scenarios in which targets were either hypocritical (actions and beliefs did not match) or non-hypocritical (actions and beliefs match). Results showed that hypocrisy elicited anger and disgust but had no significant effect on general affect. Hypocritical actions were perceived as less morally acceptable, but the effect was relatively weak. Analysis of the alignment of the participant's beliefs with the scenario character's beliefs suggest that such alignment may attenuate the overall impact of hypocrisy. Judgments of hypocrisy may be driven more by feelings of moral betrayal than by hypocrisy itself, but follow-up studies are required to establish this conclusion.