

Volume 13, No. 12

Submitted: November 2, 2007

First Revision: January 30, 2008

Accepted: January 30, 2008

Published: February 3, 2008

BEING TOGETHER IN A SITUATION OF INDUCED HYPOCRISY

Valérie Fointiat

University of Provence, France

Laboratory of Social Psychology

ABSTRACT

Induced hypocrisy is considered as a new dissonance paradigm, in which two factors (normative commitment and mindfulness of past transgressions), are combined. The inconsistency between 'what I am preaching' and 'what I have done' is reduced via behavioral change in line with the prior preach. In this study, we compared two different operationalizations of commitment factor. In a paradigmatic condition, every participant for herself wrote a pro-normative advocacy. In an collective hypocrisy condition, the normative advocacy was elaborated collectively. Afterwards, each participant was asked to remind her own transgressions. The results suggesting that collective speech is more effective to promote behavioral change than individual speech are discussed especially in light of normative focus theory.

COGNITIVE DISSONANCE

No doubt, cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger, 1957) is a pivotal theory in social psychology (Harmon-Jones & Mills, 1999, for a review). Cognitive dissonance is defined as an aversive state of psychological tension –called dissonance- aroused when an individual holds two cognitions that are mutually inconsistent. From Festinger's perspective (1957), dissonance arousal motivates the individual to reduce dissonance, by changing or modifying one or both of the inconsistent cognitions. This crucial hypothesis has been tested in several paradigms: the free-choice paradigm (Brehm, 1956), the effort-justification paradigm (Aronson & Mills, 1959), the belief-disconfirmation paradigm (Festinger, Riecken & Schachter, 1956) and the forced-compliance paradigm (Festinger & Carlsmith, 1959). In forced compliance paradigm, the individual freely performs a counter-attitudinal behavior (arguing a position I don't believe in) or a counter-motivational behavior (performing a problematic behavior). In such a situation, dissonance can be reduced by modifying private attitude to correspond more closely to what was argued (e.g. attitude change) or by changing the subsequent behavior in line with the previous problematic behavior (e.g. behavioral change), even if this mode of dissonance reduction remains the least explored, maybe because of the difficulty in observing it.

Interestingly, most paradigms of dissonance have emerged in the 50's (free-choice paradigm, Brehm, 1956; effort-justification paradigm, Aronson & Mills, 1959; belief-disconfirmation paradigm, Festinger, Riecken & Schachter, 1956) and for four decades, any new paradigm has been explored. In 1991, two paradigms appeared simultaneously in the literature: the double-forced compliance paradigm (Joule, 1991) and the induced hypocrisy paradigm (Aronson et al., 1991). The former defends a comeback to the roots of the original theory; the latter is in attendance on one of the most famous alternate interpretations of dissonance effects: the self-consistency theory (Aronson, 1968 ; Thibodeau & Aronson, 1992).

Inducing Hypocrisy to Promote Behavioral Change

Hypocrisy paradigm is based upon a very simple principle: saying one thing and doing another thing. The saliency of the discrepancy between what is preaching and what was done (in a recent past) arouses a feeling of hypocrisy (i.e. dissonance). Changing the subsequent behavior into line with the normative speech is the easiest way to reduce the uncomfortable state of hypocrisy.

The procedure of induction of hypocrisy involves the combination of two factors. The first one (commitment) consists in leading the participants to advocate the importance of conducting a pro-social behavior. Commitment factor could be operationalized via videotaping speeches, writing essays or signing petitions. On the other hand, the second factor (mindfulness) is usually operationalized by asking participants to think about times when he/she did not behave in line with the advocated standards. The awareness of past failures can also be operationalized by asking participants to respond to a questionnaire in which each item illustrates a plausible transgression.

A Set of Three Experiments

At the beginning of the 90's, a series of three experiments (Aronson *et al.*, 1991, Dickerson *et al.*, 1992, Stone *et al.*, 1994) sharing the same between subjects experimental design 2 (public commitment : pro-attitudinal speech versus no speech) x 2 (mindfulness : salience of past transgressions versus no salience) was realized. Only one of the four experimental conditions can arouse dissonance and subsequently lead its reduction: the condition that combines commitment and mindfulness.

For example, Aronson *et al.* (1991) and Stone *et al.* (1994) induced participants to feel hypocritical about their condom use. In the crucial hypocrisy condition, participants videotaped speeches advocating the systematic use of condoms (commitment factor). After this advocacy, they were asked to list times in their own past when they had failed to practice safe sex (mindfulness factor). The induction of hypocrisy in the Dickerson *et al.* 's experiment (1992) was quite different. Participants were recruited at the university swimming-pool. In the paradigmatic condition they were led to sign a flyer promoting water conservation (commitment factor); afterwards, they were led to fulfil a questionnaire in which each question illustrated a plausible transgression (mindfulness factor).

In these three basic experiments, dissonance was predicted in the condition combining the commitment and the mindfulness factors; in reverse, dissonance was not predicted in the conditions in which either factor (commitment or mindfulness) was absent. The results supported the prediction: Participants in the hypocrisy conditions showed not only an increase in intentions to use condoms (Aronson *et al.*, 1991), but also actually bought more condoms (Stone *et al.*, 1994) than participants in the other three experimental conditions. Furthermore, participants made hypocritical about their water use, subsequently took shorter showers than control participants (Dickerson *et al.*, 1992).

Self-Consistency Interpretation

From the self-consistency perspective (Aronson, 1968 ; Thibodeau & Aronson, 1992), most persons have a positive self-concept. To put it in another words, people are inclined to view themselves as competent, moral, rationale and so on. Dissonance is aroused when persons behave in a way that they view as incompetent, immoral or non rationale. Hence, dissonance comes from the inconsistency between the person self-concept as a moral person and the person's behavior of doing something which is immoral. In other words, any violation of an important element of the self-concept leads to dissonance arousal and subsequently to dissonance reduction. The aim of the process of reduction is the restoration of the global self-concept. To put it in other words, «we believe that making the link between an attitude and a behavior (or more specifically, between the self-concept and behavior) accessible is a necessary component of the hypocrisy effect. In our view, it is the motivation that results from this connection that causes subjects to take behavioral action» (Stone *et al.*, 1994).

Taken together, research conducted in the hypocrisy paradigm relate to attitudes which are «high in social desirability» (Stone *et al.*, 1997) : for instance, AIDS prevention (Aronson *et al.*, 1991, Stone *et al.*, 1994), promoting water conservation (Dickerson *et al.*, 1992), recycling to preserve

natural resources (Fried & Aronson, 1995, Fried, 1998), donation for homeless people (Stone et al., 1997), promoting road safety (Fointiat, 2004, Fointiat & Grosbras, 2007), generosity (McKimmie et al., 2003). From our point of view, the aim of the commitment factor is to anchor the normative dimension of the preach. In the first articles, commitment factor was described as pro-attitudinal speeches (Aronson et al., 1991 ; Dickerson et al., 1992 ; Stone et al., 1994 ; Fried & Aronson, 1995 ; Aronson, 1999). Few years later, “pro-attitudinal advocacy” becomes “pro-social advocacy” (Stone et al., 1997) or “normative advocacy” (Fointiat, 2004). The sliding from pro-attitudinal speech (that is, conform to the personal belief) to pro-normative speech (that is, socially approved) have to be emphasized.

AIM OF THE STUDY

The aim of the present study was to test the efficiency of collectivistic versus individualistic dimension of ‘commitment’ factor. The early works on norm formations (Sherif, 1935) and more recently on focus normative theory (Cialdini et al., 1990, 1991; Kallgren et al., 2000) suggest that social norms guide the behaviors when the norms are salient in the context of action. The results obtained in earlier research (Aronson et al., 1991 ; Stone et al., 1994 ; Dickerson et al., 1992) support the idea that recalling past behaviors without being aware of their counter-normative dimension is not sufficient to arouse dissonance. We suggest that the so-called «preach» is a means to make the individual aware of what must be done (descriptive norm) and/or what is socially approved or disapproved (injunctive norm). Whatever the nature of social norm (descriptive versus injunctive), the function of the preach is to make the norm salient. The recall of transgressions should enhance the spread between the norm and his/her past behavior.

In other words, we hypothesized a greater hypocritical effect when the «preach» is collectively debated and elaborated, rather than it is individualistically elaborated (main hypothesis).

Moreover, we expected a hypocritical effect only when both commitment and mindfulness factors are combined. In other words, hypocritical effect should be higher when the two factors (commitment and mindfulness) are combined rather than only one (for instance commitment) is manipulated (preliminary hypothesis 1) or rather than anyone is manipulated (preliminary hypothesis 2).

METHOD

Participants and Design

93 participants were recruited individually on the campus (University of Provence, France) ; they were told by the experimenter that the study was about how people perceived the driving rules.

Participants were randomly assigned to one of the four conditions (with between 22 and 25 participants per condition). In a control condition, the target-behavior was directly presented. In the no-hypocrisy condition, only the commitment factor was manipulated (i.e. advocating the respect of the driving rules). Two hypocrisy conditions were run. In the paradigmatic-hypocrisy condition, the participants wrote pro-social advocacies everyone for himself/herself. In the collective hypocrisy condition, the participants were collectively invited to develop normative

arguments (in favour of the respect of driving rules). The second factor of hypocrisy induction – salience of transgressions- was performed individually.

Experimental Procedure and Measures

In the control condition, the experimenter specified he was looking for volunteers. Within the framework of a prevention campaign, she needed volunteers to distribute flyers (main dependent variable). Furthermore, each volunteer has to specify how much flyers he/she was able to distribute (dependent variable 2).

In a no-hypocrisy condition (commitment-only condition), the experimenter welcomed the participants (with 3 to 5 participants in each group) and invited them to write an essay in favour of the respect of the driving rules. Each participant wrote his/her own arguments. In that sense, the experiment was collective but the task was performed individually. Immediately after the advocacy, the experimenter presented the dependent variables.

In the paradigmatic hypocrisy condition (individual commitment and individual mindfulness), the experimenter welcomed the participants; he presented the first task: writing a pro social advocacy, in the same way than the no-hypocrisy condition. Immediately after this task, each participant has to list his/her own transgressions (i.e. no-respect of speed limitations and so on). As soon as the transgressions were listed, the dependent variables were administered.

In the collective hypocrisy condition (collective commitment and individual mindfulness), the commitment step was collectively performed. That is, the experimenter invited the participants to argue, to explicit the benefits of respecting the driving rules. In other words, everyone was invited to express his/her own view. On the other hand, the mindfulness step was individually performed : the experimenter asked each participant to list their own past transgressions.

RESULTS

The results are presented in table 1.

Table 1: Compliance with the Request (Volunteering).

| | Control (n = 25) | No hypocrisy (n = 24) | Paradigmatic hypocrisy (n = 24) | Collective hypocrisy (n = 22) |
|---|---------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Participants who agree to distribute flyers | 4/25 16 % | 6/24 25 % | 8/24 33 % | 14/22 63 % |
| Mean quantity of flyers among participants who agreed | 1 | 1 | 1.25 | 1.93 |
| Mean quantity of flyers among overall participants | .16 | .25 | .41 | 1.22 |

Volunteering

As expected (preliminary hypotheses 1 and 2) the combination of the two factors (commitment and mindfulness) is necessary to produce the hypocritical effect. Compared to no-hypocrisy condition (25 per cent), participants in both hypocrisy conditions (48 per cent) are more inclined to volunteer, Chi square (1, 70) = 3,42, $p = .06$, $\phi = .22$. Moreover, taken together the hypocritical conditions (48 per cent) are significantly different from the control condition (16 per cent), Chi square (1, 71) $\text{cor} = 5,76$, $p = .01$, $\phi = .28$.

Furthermore, according to our main hypothesis, the collective elaboration of preach (collective hypocrisy condition) seems to enhance the hypocritical effect. In the paradigmatic hypocrisy condition, 8 out of the 24 participants (33 per cent) volunteered to distribute flyers, whereas 14 out of the 22 participants (63 per cent) in the collective hypocrisy condition volunteered, Chi square (1, 46) = 4,22, $p = .03$, $\phi = .30$.

Amount of Volunteering

Quantity of Flyers among Participants Who Agreed

The data were analysed with LSD test (Least Significant Difference). The results suggest that the hypocritical participants have accepted to distribute more flyers when they were led to develop collectively the normative arguments, (Mean = 1,93) than did participants in the paradigmatic condition (Mean = 1,25), even if the difference indicates only a tendency ($p = .08$). The collective hypocrisy condition is also significantly different from no-hypocrisy condition (Mean = 1, $p = .03$) and marginally different from control condition (Mean = 1, $p = .06$).

Quantity of Flyers among Overall Participants

LSD comparisons revealed that the collective hypocrisy condition (Mean = 1,22) is significantly different from each other condition: control condition (Mean = .16, $p = .000$), no-hypocrisy condition (Mean = .25, $p = .000$), paradigmatic condition (Mean = .41, $p = .000$).

DISCUSSION

According to the prior research, combining the two factors (commitment and mindfulness) is necessary to induce hypocrisy, and the subsequent behavioral change.

Interestingly, the results suggest that the paradigmatic procedure could benefit from the collective elaboration of preach, that is the commitment factor. The emergence of collective arguments point out not only the descriptive dimension of the norm (what is commonly done), but the injunctive dimension of the norm (what is socially approved or disapproved). Compared to the paradigmatic situation of hypocrisy, the normative position as it is expressed in the collective hypocrisy condition cannot be ignored. Furthermore, Cialdini et al. (2006) assumed that injunctive norms are more able to induce behavioral change than descriptive norms. In that sense, injunctive norms are less dependent from the context than descriptive norms. The greater behavioral change observed in the collective hypocrisy condition can be understood in reference to the focus normative theory. One can consider that the group discussion (commitment factor)

make salient the injunctive norm, whereas the classical operationalization of commitment factor make salient the descriptive norm. Of course, the current research cannot make this point clear. But, we hope this assumption could lead to further experimental investigations.

On the other hand, one can argue that each transgression is inconsistent with the prior preach. Each transgression recalled increases the global amount of dissonance. If it is the case, it can explain the greater behavioral change in the collective hypocrisy condition rather than in the paradigmatic condition. Thus, it is conceivable that participants in the collective hypocrisy condition recall more transgressions than participants in the paradigmatic condition. The results do not support this assumption : participants in the original condition (Mean = 3.04) do not recall more transgressions than do participants in the paradigmatic condition (Mean = 2.79). Concerning the number of recalled transgressions, Fointiat (in revision) has shown that hypocritical effect was not observed when participants recalled a lot of serious transgressions. Further research should investigate the impact of quantity and quality (serious versus harmless) of transgressions on the arousal and/or reduction processes of hypocrisy.

REFERENCES

- Aronson, E. 1968. "Dissonance theory : Progress and problems". In R.P. Abelson, E. Aronson, W.J. McGuire, T.M. Newcomb, M.J. Rosenberg & P.H. Tannenbaum (Eds). *Theories of cognitive consistency : A sourcebook* (pp 5-27). Chicago : Rand McNally.
- Aronson, E. 1999. "Dissonance hypocrisy, and the self-concept". In E. Harmon-Jones & J. Mills (Ed.). *Cognitive dissonance : Progress on a pivotal theory in social psychology*. Washington, DC : APA.
- Aronson, E. Fried, C.B., Stone, J. 1991. "Overcoming denial and increasing the intention to use condoms through the induction of hypocrisy". *American Journal of Public Health*, 81, 1636-1638.
- Aronson, E., Mills, J. 1959. "The effect of severity of initiation on liking for a group". *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 59, 177-181.
- Brehm, J.W. 1956. "Postdecision changes in the desirability of alternatives". *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 52 : 384-389.
- Cialdini, R.B., Demaine, L.J., Sagarin, B.J., Barrett, D.W., Rhoads, K, Winter, P.L. 2006. "Managing social norms for persuasive impact". *Social Influence*, 1, 1, 3-15.
- Cialdini, R.B., Kallgren, C.A., Reno, R.R. 1991. "A focus theory of normative conduct : A theoretical refinement and reevaluation of the role of norms in human behaviour". In L. Berkowitz (Ed.), *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology* (pp. 201-234). San Diego : Academic Press.

Cialdini, R.B., Reno, R.R., Kallgren, C.A. 1990. "A focus theory of normative conduct : Recycling the concept of norms to reduce littering in public places". *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 58, 1015-1026.

Dickerson, C. Thibodeau, R. Aronson, E., Miller, D. 1992. "Using cognitive dissonance to encourage water conservation". *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 22, 841-854.

Festinger, L. 1957. *A theory of cognitive dissonance*. Stanford, CA : Stanford University Press.

Festinger, L., Carlsmith, J.M. 1959. "Cognitive consequences of forced compliance". *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 59, 203-210.

Festinger, L., Riecken, H.W., Schachter, S. 1956. *When prophecy fails*. Mineapolis : University of Minesota Press.

Fointiat, V. 2004. "'I know what I have to do, but ...': When hypocrisy leads to behavioural change". *Personality and Social Behavior*, 32 (8), 741-746.

Fointiat, V. Grosbras, J-M. In press. " Dire une chose et en faire une autre : De la déclaration de liberté dans le paradigme de l'hypocrisie induite". *Psychologie Française*.

Fried, C.B. 1998. "Hypocrisy and identification with transgressions : A case of undetected dissonance". *Basic and Applied Social Psychology*, 20, 145-154.

Fried, C.B., Aronson, E. 1995. "Hypocrisy, misattribution, and dissonance reduction". *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 21, 925-933.

Joule, R-V. 1991. "Double forced compliance : A new paradigm in cognitive dissonance theory". *Journal of Social Psychology*, 131, 839-845.

Kallgren, C.A., Reno, R.R., Cialdini, R.B. 2000. "A focus theory of normative conduct : When norms do and do not affect behaviours". *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 26, 8, 1002-1012.

McKimmie, B.M., Terry, D.J., Hoog, M.A., Manstead, A.S.R., Spears, R. , Doosje, B. 2003. "I'm a hypocrite but so is everyone else : Group support and the reduction of cognitive dissonance". *Group Dynamics : Theory, Research, and Practice*, 7, 214-224.

Sherif, M. 1935. "A study of some social factors in perception", *Archives of psychology*, 27, 187.

Stone, J., Aronson, E., Crain, A.L., Winslow, M.P., Fried, C.B. 1994. "Inducing hypocrisy as a means of encouraging young adults to use condoms". *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 20, 116-128.

Stone, J., Weigand, A.W., Cooper, J. Aronson, E. 1997. "When exemplification fails : Hypocrisy and the motive for self-integrity". *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 72, 54-65.

Thibodeau, R., Aronson, E. 1992. "Taking a closer look : Reasserting the role of the self-concept in dissonance theory". *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 18, 591-602.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Valérie Fointiat is Assistant Professor of Social Psychology at the University of Provence, France. Professor Fointiat conducts research on compliance strategies, cognitive dissonance and causal attribution. E-mail : Valerie.Fointiat@univ-provence.fr