Moral Cognition in Adolescence and Emerging Adulthood

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Introduction

The study of moral cognition has a long history in developmental science. Indeed, moral stage theory was once the very model of ontogenetic development during the latter decades of the twentieth century. The pioneer generation of researchers typically addressed stage-related developmental change in conceptions of justice (Kohlberg et al., 1983) and in related domains such as interpersonal (Selman, 1980), prosocial (Eisenberg et al., 2006), and social conventional (Turiel, 1983) reasoning. Although there are still abiding concerns to map stage-related change in conceptions of moral judgment (Gibbs, 2004) and prosocial reasoning (Eisenberger et al. 2014), the landscape of moral cognitive development has markedly changed (Lapsley & Carlo, 2014).

One striking trend of recent research is how porous the boundary of the moral domain has become and how extensively it is implicated across and within the entire fabric of development. Concerns about the proper boundaries of the moral domain, both in terms of what it has traditionally neglected (e.g., moral emotions, prosocial reasoning, virtues, self-identity, and culture) and what it confounds (e.g., reasoning about social convention) has opened up important lines of inquiry. Morality concerns justice, fairness, and harm, on a traditional account, but this is now investigated within the context of peer friendships and social organization, and in terms of complicating domain considerations. Morality concerns prosocial response to the distress and needs of others, seemingly unbidden by Kantian moral imperative, and this is now examined in the context of families and culture. Moral cognition is a product of selves with personality and thus the moral self is a target of inquiry.

Furthermore, it is now apparent that moral emotions like guilt and shame and emotive capacities like empathy and sympathy are indispensable to moral judgment. As Sherman (1989, p. 45) put it, “We notice through feeling what might otherwise go unheeded by a cool and detached intellect” and without the emotions “we do not fully register the facts” (p. 47). Moral cognition has many facets and is interwoven within many components of development.

One theme of this chapter, then, is that moral cognition is implicated across and within the interleaved experience of coming of age: in how adolescents and youth form friendships, navigate peer groups, expand and reduce social boundaries, engage media, experience culture, construct self-identity. It is implicated in family life and schools, in prosocial behavior and character, cognition and emotion. As Iris Murdoch (2003) put it, “Morality is and ought to be, concerned with the whole of our being” (p. 495), which is to insinuate morality into every corner of developmental experience. Hence few topics within adolescent psychology are completely specified without consideration of the moral domain; and no single chapter in standard developmental textbooks can contain it.

We selected topics that illustrate the way moral considerations attach to wide swaths of development in the second and third decades and life, and ramify in common challenges that face adolescents and emerging adults. We first consider two approaches that devolve from social cognitive domain theory to illustrate the way moral judgments play out in peer and ingroup social contexts. We next examine prosocial moral reasoning with particular emphasis on parenting and family socialization. Our final section focuses on the way moral cognition connects to self-identity, drives moral disengagement, and has implications for recent research on moral essentialism and the moral true self. We conclude with some observations about the way forward with respect to integrative lines of research.

II. Moral Judgment and Social Cognitive Domains

Over the last several decades social domain theory has evolved to become one of the most productive research programs in developmental science (Smetana et al., 2014; Nucci, 1981; Turiel, 1981). On this view social reasoning is structured around domains of experience. Moral judgments concern issues of harm, welfare, rights, equality, and fair allocation of resources. Societal judgments concern norms, customs, and conventions that regulate social interactions within families, peer groups and social organizations of all kinds. The psychological domain concerns matters for which personal jurisdiction is claimed. One striking feature of this research program is that it has been extended into wide fields of application. Social cognitive domain theory has something to say about parenting and family socialization, peer inclusion and exclusion, moral education, identity and prejudice, fairness and autonomy. It covers the vast terrain of adolescent psychology where social cognition matters, which is just about everywhere. For example, the arena of discretion that adolescents carve out as a matter of personal jurisdiction suggests a close connection between domain reasoning and psychological individuation, with implications for self-development, mental health and well-being (Nucci et al., 2005).

Moreover the social situations that confront adolescents and young adults are rarely uncomplicated as they involve a mélange of moral, conventional, and personal considerations. Two recent lines of research address how adolescents and emerging adults coordinate moral and nonmoral concerns when reaching moral judgments and how moral judgments are implicated in the experience of peer group participation and exclusion.

Continuity and Discontinuity in Adolescent Moral Judgment

Nucci, Turiel, & Roded (2017) showed that the development of moral judgment is not a simple matter of linear improvement as if climbing a staircase. In the rich context where moral issues reside decisions must be reached in ways that require coordination of competing situational elements. In this study children and adolescents were asked to think about the behavior of story characters who engaged in three types of moral actions (direct harm by hitting, failing to return dropped money, and helping another in distress) but in situations that presented conflict with other considerations. For example, in the hitting scenario, the protagonist is deciding whether to engage in unprovoked hitting ("Unconflicted"), hit another in self-defense ("Conflicted-Self") or in defense of another child ("Conflicted Other"). In the helping example, the protagonist sees a boy in pain after falling and considers helping by getting his parents ("Unconflicted"), wonders whether helping will get him cut from the team for missing a tryout ("Conflicted-Self"), or considers whether helping will get his brother cut from the team for missing a tryout ("Conflicted-Other").

In addition to action (hitting, stealing, helping) and context (unconflicted, conflicted-self, conflicted-other), a third complication was the nature of the target of the action: a generic "another" boy or girl, a child who was vulnerable because of age or disability, or an antagonist who had previously slapped or teased the protagonist. Participants were asked whether the protagonist should perform the act, by what rights and under what conditions. The results showed,

not surprisingly, that children and adolescents strongly opposed unprovoked hitting and stealing and supported prosocial sharing. In straightforward prototypic situations there are few age differences. Indeed, individuals from an early age know a moral issue when they see one, core knowledge of which might be evident in infancy (Hamlin & Wynn, 2011).

But Nucci and colleagues (2017) also showed that discontinuity was evident when moral judgment faced situational and relational complexity. Although 8-year old children and older adolescents (16 years) came down on the side of moral judgment, the younger adolescents (age 10-14) were not so sure. According to the authors, this U-shaped pattern in judging acts and the right to engage in them reflected a greater willingness on the part of young adolescents to consider nonmoral personal choice and personal jurisdiction in making decisions.

This developmental rhythm was described in terms of three levels. At Level 1 ("Straightforward One-Dimensional") the moral elements of the situation, whether it involved harm and welfare, for example, unambiguously drove moral judgment at the expense of non-moral considerations. At Level 2 ("Multidimensional Uncoordinated") there is an awareness of features that induce moral ambiguity, but moral and nonmoral features are not coordinated in any systematic way, opening the door for self-interest to gain traction. At Level 3 ("Multidimensional Coordinated"), the moral and non-moral elements are carefully weighed and sources of moral ambiguity are resolved by systematic coordination of multiple features of the situation.

There are few studies that examine moral judgement with this complexity in mind; and if the age-related pattern of moral judgment demonstrated here is non-linear, its pattern of development is sensibly progressive and, on the authors' view, compatible with constructivist social cognitive development and with important implications for how moral education is sequenced and structured (Nucci & Turiel, 2009).

Domains of Reasoning and Peer Groups

Social cognitive domain theory also has implications for understanding how adolescents navigate peer groups, particularly with respect to issues of peer inclusion and exclusion (Hitti et al., 2014; Killen, 2007; Killen et al., 2013.) As is typically the case with clear moral issues, most adolescents oppose straightforward exclusion on moral grounds of fairness and equality, but when exclusion decisions are overlaid with matters of group membership, cohesion, and solidarity, or involve personal jurisdiction about friendship and affiliation, then active coordination is required (Killen, 2007). In one study children and adolescents rejected social exclusion as wrong on moral grounds, even in stereotypic contexts (e.g., excluding a boy from ballet), but when the decision came down to which of two children to pick for the last spot on the roster, social conventional considerations encouraged adolescents to endorse exclusion for the sake of effective group functioning (Killen & Stangor, 2001). Complex social situations also require coordination of moral and personal considerations. For example, Killen and colleagues (2004) showed that although most emerging adults thought it morally wrong to countenance exclusion in cross-race relationships, exclusion was better supported if cross-relations required more intimate contact, in which case exclusion was judged not a moral issue but one of personal jurisdiction.

Recently a social reasoning developmental model has been proposed that integrates developmental social domain theory with social identity theory, which addresses the social psychological dimensions of group affiliation (Killen & Rutland, 2011). In one study, Hitti and colleagues (2014) investigated how group membership contributes to decisions about social exclusion and fair distribution of resources. They showed that adolescents were not willing to exclude a member who deviated from social conventional

group norms (e.g., wearing an assigned shirt), but violation of egalitarian norms (allocating resources unequally when the group wanted equal distribution) was grounds for exclusion. As the authors put it, "there are contexts in which children view exclusion as consistent with moral principles, such as when a deviant member of a group rejects norms about the equal allocation of resources" (Hitti et al., 2014, p. 464).

III. Prosocial Moral Cognition

Prosocial reasoning in adolescence and emerging adulthood is also a surging topic of research interest and one that has progressively expanded into many features of adolescent and youth development, including peer and family dynamics, emotions, and psychosocial adjustment (e.g., Carlo, 2011; Eisenberg et al., 2006; Knight et al., 2014; Ongley & Malti, 2014; Padilla et al., this volume). Prosocial reasoning arises in the conflict of whether to satisfy one's own needs, wishes, and preferences or those of others, when there is no formal obligation to do so. Responses to prosocial dilemmas coalesce into discrete developmental levels that show both age-related change and patterns of individual differences from childhood to early adulthood (Eisenberg et al, 2014). In early childhood prosocial decisions are driven by self-focused hedonistic concerns but this gives way in later childhood to decisions motivated by empathic concern for others and then to internalized prosocial norms regarding the dignity of others and the welfare of society by adolescence and emerging adulthood.

The rhythm of prosocial development moves from hedonistic egoism to concerns for the welfare of others (from self-to-other), but it also moves in the opposite direction, from social stereotypy and approval to strongly internalized considerations where the sense of self hangs in the balance (from other-to-self). Moreover, the development of standard measures of prosocial reasoning (Carlo et al., 1992) and prosocial tendencies (Carlo & Randall, 2002; Carlo et al., 2002; Caprara & Pastorelli, 1993) has facilitated the extension of these constructs into almost every area of study within adolescent development.

Prosociality is associated, for example, with positive self-esteem (Fu et al., 2017; Zuffianò et al., 2014), emotional well-being (Martin & Huebner, 2007), academic grades (Caprara et al, 2014; Carlo et al., 2017), popularity (Findley-Van Nostrand & Ojanen, 2018; Niu et al., 2016; Wolters et al., 2014), friendship quality (Poorthuis et al., 2012), and peer relationships (Markiewicz et al., 2001). Prosocial growth is associated with constructivist theory of mind in early adolescence (Weimer et al., 2017) and exposure to diversity experiences in college (Brandenberger & Bowman, 2015). It counters deviant peer affiliation (Carlo et al., 2014), dating violence, (Foshee et al. 2015), and depressive symptoms (Padilla-Walker et al., 2020); and is associated with youth purpose (Summers & Falco, 2020), adolescent generativity (Lawford et al., 2005), civic engagement (Metzger et al., 2013), positive changes in personality (Kanacri et al, 2014), and meaning in life (Van Tongeren et al., 2016).

How prosocial moral reasoning and behavioral tendencies are socialized within families during adolescence has attracted research interest (Laible et al., 2019). The intuition that prosocial behavior is related to parental socialization of a certain kind, such as authoritative parenting style, relational qualities of warmth and sensitivity, discursive communication within the family, parental control and inductive discipline, monitoring of behavior, the quality of solicitation and disclosure of information about activities, among other variables, is largely confirmed (Carlo et al., 2007; Hastings et al., 2007; Laible et al., 2019; Laird & Zeringue, 2019; Mounts & Allen, 2019; Padilla-Walker et al., 2012). Sometimes the influence of parenting on prosocial outcomes is mediated partially through affective and social cognitive variables, such as sympathy, empathic concern and perspective taking (e.g., Davis & Carlo, 2018; Shen et al. 2013; Van der Graaf et al., 2018).

There is interest in tracking culture-specific variations in how families socialize prosocial dispositions (Carlo & Conejo, 2019; Carlo et al., 2018; de Guzman et al., 2019). Familism values, for example, emphasize the importance of maintaining close family relationships, providing familial emotional support, giving priority to family responsibilities and obligations, and these values might be particularly characteristic of socialization in Latinx families (Knight & Carlo, 2012).

In one study (Knight et al., 2014) a sample of young Mexican-American adolescents responded to assessments of familism values (family emotional support, family obligation, family-as-referent), sociocognitive traits (perspective-taking and prosocial moral reasoning) and prosocial tendencies. Six types of prosocial tendencies were assessed: a tendency to respond in emotionally evocative situations (*Emotional*), when directed or requested to do so (*Compliant),* in emergency situations (*Dire*), without personal considerations (*Altruistic),* and when there is an audience (*Public*) or no audience (*Anonymous*). Three of these tendencies (Compliant, Emotional, Dire) were thought to be particularly linked to the family values of Mexican American socialization.

The results indicated that young adolescents who strongly endorsed familism values also reported higher scores on five of the six prosocial tendencies (excepting Altruistic). Moreover, the effect of familism on prosocial tendencies was partially mediated by perspective-taking, and the indirect effects were particularly strong for Compliant, Emotional, and Dire, the specific prosocial behaviors linked to Mexican American family socialization. Prosocial reasoning also partially mediated the relationship between familism and the Altruistic prosocial tendency, although most of the indirect effects of familism on prosocial tendency went through perspective-taking.

Apart from demonstrating the role of familism in underwriting culturally supportive prosocial behaviors, this study is of interest for another reason. The sociocognitive variables, perspective-taking and prosocial moral reasoning, appeared to be differentially associated with prosocial behavior. Familism was associated with Altruistic behavior through prosocial moral reasoning, but prosocial moral reasoning did not mediate the link between familism and any other prosocial tendency—that was left to perspective taking. Insofar as the summit of prosocial reasoning entails a strongly internalized commitment to prosociality, then clearly such a commitment is not required for a wide range of prosocial behaviors other than altruism. As the authors put it, "the lack of relations between prosocial moral reasoning, and other forms of prosocial behavior…is consistent with prior research suggesting that engaging in these other forms of helping often does not require strong, internalized moral principled judgments" (p. 725). Instead, some forms of helping appear to be facilitated by advances in social cognitive skills and knowledge of social norms. In the next section we take up another social cognitive construct, moral self-identity, which does entail a strong internalization of morality and close identification with self-identity.

IV. Moral Cognition and the Moral Self

In this section we examine three conceptually similar literatures: moral self-identity, moral disengagement, and moral true self. The first two constructs have sources in social cognitive theories and are mirror images of each other in the sense that moral action and inaction have implications for self-approbation or censure. Moreover, although moral identity and moral disengagement can reflect individual differences, they also reflect developmental processes. In contrast, belief in the moral true self is situated within the cognitive essentialism literature that makes fewer developmental assumptions.

Moral Self-Identity

How individuals come to extend prosocial help to others is foundational to the prosocial moral cognition literature, as we have seen. But what are the limits of prosocial benevolence? What if the other is not a member of one's in-group, comes from another tribe, political party, ideological perspective, ethno-racial identification, or religious confession? If prosocial behavior is driven mostly by stereotypic and conventional norms, then it is by no means certain that prosocial tendencies could induce one to reach across the aisle to extend a helping hand to the "other."

Moral foundations theory holds that the poles of loyalty/betrayal, authority/subversion and purity/degradation constitute the *binding foundations* that are instrumental in holding people together as groups and communities (Graham et al., 2009), but could have a dark side if it encourages in-groups to exclude out-groups or to derogate them (or worse). Indeed, across three studies Smith et al. (2014) showed that individuals who strongly endorse binding foundations showed more willingness to support torture of outgroup members or to withhold help from them. Yet this dark side of the binding foundations was attenuated by a strong sense of moral identity. Individuals with pronounced moral identity are more likely to include outgroup members into an expansive circle of moral regard (Reed & Aquino, 2003); and are more likely to engage in prosocial behavior.

Evidence like this has elevated moral identity to one of the most important topics of research in moral psychology. Moral identity describes the centrality of morality to one's self-concept (Hardy & Carlo, 2005). It emerged in moral development research as a way to conceptualize the source of motivation that moves moral judgment all the way to action. There is often a disjunction between knowing the right thing to do and actually doing it; indeed, the correlation between moral judgment and moral behavior is often modest (Blasi, 1980). Yet moral self-identity bridges the gap. One is more likely to follow through on what moral duty requires, on this account, if morality is essential, central and important for self-understanding: that is, if one's sense of selfhood is at stake in every moral decision (Aquino & Reed, 2002; Blasi, 1984). Of course individuals have many identities, morality among them, and so the resources of social cognitive theory have been utilized to understand the conditions of activation, and the availability and accessibility of moral identity, including the situational factors that prime it (Aquino et al., 2009; Lapsley & Narvaez, 2004).

Moral identity is a strong and pervasive predictor of a wide range of morally significant behavior (Hertz & Krettanauer, 2016; Lapsley & Hardy, 2017). It plays a significant role in conceptions of moral character and virtue (Cohen & Morse, 2014; Lapsley, 2016; Nucci, 2019); and its developmental features have attracted much interest (Kingsford et al., 2018; Krettenauer & Hertz, 2015). For example, Krettenauer and colleagues have shown that moral identity shows mean level increases across the life course, emerging strongly in adolescence and emerging adulthood and with shifts to internal sources of moral motivation by middle age (Krettenauer & Victor, 2017; Krettenauer et al., 2016). As Krettenauer et al. (2016, p. 981) put it, "as individuals grow older, they assign greater self-importance to those values they consider important for defining a highly moral person."

The self-importance of moral values is also related to generativity concerns in emerging adulthood. Frensch et al. (2007) showed, for example, that adolescents who chose "fairness" and "kindness" as values most important to themselves at age 16 and age 20 were more likely to report higher scores on a generativity composite index at age 20 than adolescents who chose non-moral values such as, "ambitious," "hardworking," and "independent." Similarly, Pratt, Arnold and Lawford (2009) report evidence that moral identity themes in adolescent turning point narratives at age 16 (and at age 20) were robust predictors of generative concerns (as measured by the Loyola Generativity Scale) and generative story

themes at age 24. Narrative moral identity ratings from stories told at age 16 were also a strong predictor of youth involvement in the community at ages 20 and 24. According to Pratt and colleagues (2009, p. 311), narrative moral identity development appears to reflect "a motivational commitment to moral values and action ('moral steadfastness') that may be gradually translated into a story of the self's moral life." And the narrative story of the moral self may be foundational to meeting the developmental challenge of generativity in early adulthood and beyond.

Moral identity is also studied in contexts typical of the adolescent experience. For example, moral identity counters bullying (Pozzoli et al., 2016) and antisocial behavior (Kavussanu et al., 2015). In one study, moral disengagement and deviant peer affiliation predicted the perpetration of bullying, but these relationships were moderated by moral identity (Wang et al., 2020). Moral identity moderates the link between trait anger and cyberbullying (Wang et al., 2017), and between exposure to violent video games and bullying and cyberbullying (Teng et al., 2020). Bullying is also the target of moral disengagement research.

Moral Disengagement

Moral disengagement is a rapidly growing topic of study within the moral domain, with Bandura's social cognitive theory of human agency providing the main terms of reference (Bandura et al., 1996). If the self's commitment to moral identity encourages moral behavior, its recourse to moral disengagement strategies provide a shield against self-censure when behavior violates moral standards. According to Bandura (1999), three general strategies are possible: (1) one can justify the reprehensible event so that it is not viewed as immoral; (2) one can minimize or distort the consequences of immoral conduct so that its consequences are not deemed serious after all; or (3) one can shift the attribution of blame to victims. Some specific strategies include reconstruing an immoral act in terms of some larger worthy purpose, sanitizing it with euphemistic language, or comparing it advantageously against something even worse. Displacing and diffusing responsibility, disregarding or disbelieving negative consequences, and blaming victims also serve the purpose of moral disengagement.

Research with adolescents mostly addresses the relationship between moral disengagement and peer aggression. A recent meta-analysis showed that moral disengagement is a significant predictor of aggressive behavior, with larger effect sizes evident among adolescents than children (Gini et al., 2014). The tendency to disengage moral self-sanctions is particularly evident among bullies (Gini, 2006; Perren & Gutzwiller-Helfenfinger, 2012). Of course bullying episodes are rarely enacted without an audience, and so research is also directed toward the role of peer dynamics in the context of moral disengagement. This research shows that bystander-defenders are less likely to use moral disengagement strategies (Thornberg & Jungert, 2013); and defenders are also more likely to report distress if they do not intervene as opposed to passive bystanders (Gini et al., 2018), suggesting that defenders may have stronger moral identity. On the other hand, pro-bully bystanders tend to morally disengage through diffusion of responsibility, victim-blaming and distortion of consequences (Bjärehed et al., 2020).

Perpetration and defense also depend on peer and friendship networks. Caravita and colleagues (2014) showed that moral disengagement tended to rise over the course of one year from late childhood to early adolescence, but this change also depended upon friends' moral disengagement. Given the fact that moral disengagement also tended to decline over this period among children, the authors concluded that "the influence of peers in changing moral disengagement becomes more relevant in early adolescence compared to late childhood" (p. 204), which is consistent with the increased salience of peer groups in adolescence. Moreover, the role of friends in changing moral disengagement also holds for defenders. In a related study Sijtsema and colleagues (2014) showed that in early adolescence individuals selected as friends peers who were similar in bullying (indicating a selection effect) and over time engaged in more bullying (a socialization

effect). But this effect was strongest in youth who also reported elevated moral disengagement. The selection and socialization effects were also evident for young adolescents who were defenders. Young adolescents selected as friends those who were similar in victim-defense, and this similarity increased over time.

Not enough is known about propensity to moral disengagement, how it comes about, and under what conditions is it activated. Both moral identity and moral disengagement reference the moral self, perhaps from opposite directions: the same moral self that enacts prosocial-moral action out of identity motivation also self-protects with disengagement. But it is not known the extent to which—if at all—they trade on the same developmental or experiential factors.

Two studies have examined the possible precursors to moral disengagement. Fontaine and colleagues (2014) showed that peer rejection at age 14 predicted moral disengagement at age 16-18, which in turn predicted criminal misbehavior in emerging adulthood (age 18-20). As they put it, "the individual who is peer rejected and socially disfavored may, as a result of viewing the world as unfair and unjust, development criminogenic judgment and decision-making (moral disengagement) that facilitates his or her pursuit of antisocial goals" (p. 1).

A second study (Hyde et al., 2010) investigated the contribution of early rejecting parenting and neighborhood impoverishment as variables conducive to downstream moral disengagement and antisocial behavior. Rejecting parenting within the first two years of life, neighborhood impoverishment at age 6-10, and parental and child reports of empathy predicted adolescents' report of moral disengagement at age 15. But empathy emerged as the most robust predictor of moral disengagement, in fact mediating the link between early risk factors and moral disengagement. As one possible path the authors suggest that "youth with adverse experiences with parents may develop low levels of empathy towards others during the transition to adolescence, and when combined with neighborhood risk, be primed to develop a cognitively and affectively disengaged stance towards society and others" (p. 206). Other research has targeted lack of empathy as part of the affective component of moral disengagement, and future research will undoubtedly continue to investigate the interplay of sociomoral emotions and moral cognition.

The Moral True Self

A rather different take on the moral self has emerged from the psychological essentialism literature. Essentialism is a pervasive conceptual bias whereby natural and social categories are understood as being constituted by a deep, immutable essence, rooted in biology and not apparent on the surface, that gives all members of the category its nature (Gelman, 2004; Newman & Knobe, 2019).Essentialist beliefs emerge between four- and six-years of age, and are generally pervasive across adolescence and adulthood with respect to a wide variety of social categories, including race, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, mental illness, and personality (e.g., Haslam et al., 2004; Haslam et al., 2000; Rhodes et al., 2018; Sutherland & Cimpion, 2019).

Although children hold more essentialist beliefs than adults (Heiphetz, 2019), the tendency to essentialize social categories does not appear to be strongly developmental. Yet psychological essentialism has important implications for understanding moral cognition in adolescence and emerging adulthood. For example, essentialist beliefs predict bias against out-groups and inter-group conflict (Chen & Ratliff, 2018; Diesendruck & Menachem, 2015; Smyth et al., 2017). Essentialism works against prosocial gestures and empathy for the other side (Heiphetz, 2019; O'Driscoll et al., 2020), and predicts support for a wide range of boundary-enhancing political initiatives. For example, Roberts and colleagues (2017) showed that belief in gender essentialism predicted support for

legislation that restricts access to bathrooms that correspond to one's biological sex.

Individuals also hold essentialist beliefs about the existence of a "true self" that lurks deep within and reflects our true nature quite apart from surface manifestations (Strohminger et al., 2017; Newman et al., 2015). This true nature is unmistakably *moral* (De Freitas et al., 2017; Newman et al., 2015; Newman et al., 2014; Strohminger & Nichols, 2015). Morality is thought to be so deeply constitutive of one's very identity as a person that to remove moral traits is to compromise it. Good character constitutes the true self to such an extent that young adults predict dramatic identity change would result if character changed for the worse than for the better (Heiphetz et al., 2017). Indeed, behavior change in the direction of immorality is thought to be movement away from the moral true self, but change from bad-to-good behavior, reveals it (De Freitas et al, 2018). This perhaps explains why individuals caught doing something nefarious, vile, or illegal, so often declare that such regrettable behavior does not reflect the 'real me,' and is not who they really are.

Essentialist belief in a moral true self has two other interesting features (De Freitas et al., 2018). It is not restricted to belief in the moral essence of one's own true self, for example, but applies to the true selves of others as well, including members of outgroups. In addition, some types of issues are more essential than others for grounding self-identity. Retreating from widely shared, consensual moral beliefs is thought to yield greater identity change than changing beliefs whose moral status is controversial or changing beliefs that reflect mere preferences (Heiphetz et al., 2017).

These features of moral essentialist beliefs about self and identity pose interesting questions for theoretical perspectives that treat moral self-identity as a developmental achievement or as a dimension of individual differences. It would seem that everyone believes the self to be moral in fundamental ways. Indeed, on the essentialist view, morality is the very thing that underwrites continuity in personality and so is constitutive of identity (Heiphetz et al., 2017). Hence, on its face it looks like there is deep theoretical tension between moral self-identity as a developmental achievement and the moral true self which is not.

One way out is a compelling proposal by Krettenauer (2019) that moral identity really masks two independent goal orientations: moral identity aspiration and moral identity preservation. The aspirational feature of moral identity is characterized by a motivation to reach or instantiate a self-ideal that is oriented towards morality. It is this aspect of moral identity that is studied as a dispositional or developmental construct, as reflected in research on prosocial behavior, volunteerism, moral exemplarity, and so on. The preservation goal of moral identity, on the other hand, is to maintain a view of the self as essentially good and moral, a goal that aligns with characteristics of the moral true self. To conceptualize moral identity in terms of two goals is a highly promising way to bridge the moral identity and moral true self literatures, but it also is relevant for understanding the place of moral disengagement strategies in the dynamics of the moral self. The tendency to avoid self-censure by resorting to these strategies is reflective of the moral identity-as-preservation goal orientation. These are clearly promising lines of research for the future.

VI. Research Recommendations: Integrative Possibilities

One theme of this chapter is simply that moral cognition is a pervasive feature of adolescence and emerging adulthood. A second theme is that moral psychology is alive with productive research programs. We examined manifestations of moral cognition in prominent lines of research in the moral domain, including various approaches to moral judgment, social cognitive domain theory, prosocial moral cognition, and research on moral identity, moral disengagement, and the essentialist moral self. These research programs are not standing still but are expanding into far reaches of the adolescent experience so that now topics such as peer group

dynamics, friendship, family life, bullying, self-identity, emotions, and use of media, among others, are properly situated in the moral domain; and as a result it is now difficult to tell the developmental story in these areas without reference to moral capacities.

There are welcome signs of possible theoretical integration. We noted Krettenauer's (2019) fruitful suggestion on how to reconcile the moral identity and moral true self literatures. These constructs hold special relevance for understanding certain developmental challenges of adolescence and young adulthood, such as a heightened peer orientation and felt need for friendship and community. Diesendruck (2021) argued, for example, that the development of group or social essentialism is motivated by the affiliative need to belong. Essentialist tendencies that carve out social boundaries is a way to establish a community of "us" who can be trusted to meet relational needs and provide social knowledge that helps one get along and get ahead. As Diesendruck (2021, p. 79) put it, "Rather than ensuring distancing from potential foes, essentialism may result from the yearning for potential friends" (Diesendruck, 2021, p. 79).

Along similar lines Heiphetz and colleagues (2017) documented the importance of social relationships in coordinating judgments about moral belief type and identity change. Across three studies participants judged that changes to widely shared moral beliefs (versus controversial moral beliefs or preferences) would result in more change in identity, but this relationship was mediated by judgments about how changes in moral beliefs would change relationships with the community. Accordingly the "community hypothesis may be especially powerful because individuals derive aspects of their social identity from communities" (Heiphetz et al., 2017, p. 759). Yet how moral belief type and identity change covary with typical developmental changes in peer orientation, group affiliation, and patterns of friendship across adolescence and young adulthood is a wide-open empirical question.

An additional intriguing possibility connects these constructs, along with social domain theory, with the notion of moral agency articulated by Pasupathi and Wainryb (2010). Moral agency addresses the experience of intentional moral failure, of what happens next when one visits harm on another with full knowledge that it was wrong to do so. What narrative do we tell of ourselves? How do we come to grips with the sort of person we claim ourselves to be? According to Pasupathi and Wainryb (2010), narrating instances of intentional harm-doing requires us to submit negative moral experience to self-reflection which has implications for prospective action-guidance and self-determination.

The moral agency construct occupies crucial theoretical space among the constructs considered in this review. According to Pasupathi and Wainryb (2010) domain theory does not help us understand how individuals make sense of the moral complexity that attends harm-doing other than to urge the coordination of moral and non-moral considerations. Hence moral agency works in the psychological space posterior to domain coordination. Moreover, post-judgment deliberation about harmful behavior could just as well induce moral disengagement and patterns of justifications that have lasting and detrimental effects on moral identity development. How to understand self-identity, domain coordination, and the temptation to moral disengagement within the context of narrative construction of moral agency is an exciting prospect for integrative research moving forward, and one of particular relevance to adolescence and emerging. As McAdams (2015) has argued, the "self-as-author" is the dominant theme of personality development during emerging adulthood given the felt need of individuals at this stage to construct a coherent autobiographical narrative to make sense of their lives.

Narrative approaches also revealed linkages between adolescent moral identity and generativity in emerging adulthood. Both constructs may trade on the same formative developmental experiences, such as parenting support and community involvement, that also underwrite prosocial tendencies. As yet there is only a

nascent understanding of how these constructs covary over the course of adolescent and youth development. To what extent, for example, can generative caring be considered part of the prosocial domain? Lawford and colleagues (2005, p. 261) argued that "generativity may be a developing element in the domain of prosocial moral concerns in later adolescence." The interplay of prosocial constructs (reasoning, dispositions, behavioral tendencies), narrative moral identity, and generativity in adolescence and early adulthood will be a productive line of future research.

Here's another example of a productive line of future research: Moral identity research shows that individuals with strong moral identity tend to have a wider circle of moral regard than individuals with a weaker sense of moral identity (Reed & Aquino, 2003). Similarly, moral identity moderates the relationship between binding moral foundations and derogation of outgroups, and hence serves to minimize the boundary between "us" and "them" (Roberts et al., 2017). And yet the tendency to essentialize social categories often enhances boundaries and encourages inter-group bias and conflict. We need to better understand the relationship between moral identity and the essentialist true self in this regard.

A recent study offers a promising way forward. De Freitas and Cikara (2018) showed that encouraging individuals to think about the individual true self of outgroup members actually reduced intergroup bias. Perhaps moral essentialism trumps gender or race essentialism; and whether moral identity has comparative advantages to this end would be an illuminating line of research. One wonders, too, about the implications of this research for social developmental reasoning and domain theory that is also concerned with issues of social boundaries, prejudice, and peer exclusion. Is it possible, for example, to mitigate the social boundaries erected by conventional and personal elements by consideration of the moral true selves of outgroup members?

Recent research by Rottman and colleagues (2021) also qualifies the reach of the moral "true self" with respect to how willing we are to include others in the category of moral persons. In support of what they call the Moral Stringency Hypothesis, they showed that individuals are willing to exclude others from membership in moral categories if they deviate from moral values. Apparently, the moral true self does not guide perception of others in all cases and, indeed, there is an expectation that others exhibit perfection to gain admittance to highly valued moral categories. Of course, this is hardly the standard we hold for ourselves, and as the authors point out, there is much need for further research on the stability of moral perception of others and on the work of forgiveness and redemptive processes. We suspect that narrative approaches to moral agency might profitably consider the interplay of these processes with the true self and moral stringency hypotheses.

These do not, of course, exhaust the integrative possibilities posed by this robust literature. Future research will also situate moral cognition within broader conceptions of cognitive functioning, with significant contributions from neuroscience; and with deeper appreciation of the interplay between cognition and emotion, personality and character. There is much to do, and the topics reviewed here will be the leading edge of progressive lines of research for the foreseeable future.

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