

2005

# Identity as a Source of Moral Motivation

Sam A. Hardy

*University of Nebraska–Lincoln*

Gustavo Carlo

*University of Nebraska–Lincoln*, [carlog@missouri.edu](mailto:carlog@missouri.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/psychfacpub>



Part of the [Developmental Psychology Commons](#)

---

Hardy, Sam A. and Carlo, Gustavo, "Identity as a Source of Moral Motivation" (2005). *Faculty Publications, Department of Psychology*. 812.

<https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/psychfacpub/812>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Psychology, Department of at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Publications, Department of Psychology by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

Published in *Human Development* 48 (2005), pp. 232–256.

doi 10.1159/000086859

Copyright © 2005 S. Karger AG, Basel. Used by permission.

---

## Identity as a Source of Moral Motivation

Sam A. Hardy & Gustavo Carlo

University of Nebraska–Lincoln, Lincoln, Nebraska, USA

*Corresponding author* — S. A. Hardy, Department of Psychology, University of Nebraska–Lincoln, Burnett Hall, Lincoln, NE 68588-0308 (USA) email samhardy\_unl@yahoo.com

### Abstract

Theory and research regarding moral motivation has focused for decades on the roles of moral reasoning and, to some extent, moral emotion. Recently, however, several models of morality have positioned identity as an additional important source of moral motivation. An individual has a moral identity to the extent that he or she has constructed his or her sense of self around moral concerns (e.g., moral values). This paper reviews theory and research linking moral identity to moral behavior and commitment. Additionally, it suggests several key unanswered questions about moral identity and provides recommendations for future research.

**Keywords:** Moral development, Moral identity, Moral motivation

In the last century, numerous theories of moral functioning have been proposed, each with its own assumptions about what motivates moral action. One of the first and most influential theories of morality, Kohlberg's [1969] cognitive developmental theory, focused largely on the role of moral reasoning. In contrast, Hoffman's [1970] moral socialization theory emphasized moral emotion. More recently, some scholars have suggested that moral motivation is more fully understood by considering the role of the self in morality, often termed moral self or moral identity [Hart, in press; Lapsley & Narvaez, 2004a]. For example, Blasi [1995] suggests that in moral identity, moral concerns (e.g., moral principles, goals, and commitments) are 'integrated with one's

motivational and emotional systems; are made the object of agentic processes, including responsibility; and are finally taken as a basis for the construction of one's self-concept and identity' (pp 233–234). Others have posited that moral identity entails the unity of self and moral systems [Colby & Damon, 1992], and involves '[having] an explicit theory of yourself as a moral agent – as one who acts on the basis of respect and/or concern for the rights and/or welfare of others' [Moshman, 2005, p. 121].

Scholars are increasingly convinced that identity may play an important part in moral functioning, but links between identity and morality remain unclear, both conceptually and empirically. Hence, the purpose of this paper is to assess the current state of the literature regarding moral identity, as well as to suggest future directions that may move the field forward in being able to more fully understand moral motivation. Specifically, we will first make an argument for the importance of exploring the role of identity in moral functioning. Second, we will suggest Blasi's [1983, 1984, 1995] moral identity model as a promising start for understanding links between identity and morality. Third, we will review empirical research on moral identity. Lastly, we will outline critical questions that should be addressed regarding moral identity and suggest directions for how to best approach these issues.

## **Moral Motivation: A Theoretical Review**

### *Moral Reasoning and Moral Emotion as Sources of Moral Motivation*

In the late 1950s, Lawrence Kohlberg constructed his highly influential Cognitive-Developmental Theory of morality [Kohlberg, 1969]. Kohlberg assumed that moral principles, when understood, would inherently motivate moral action. He posited that, as moral reasoning develops, individuals become more prone to utilize moral principles in making judgments in moral situations. At higher stages of moral reasoning, moral principles and their universal and prescriptive nature become more salient; as a result, individuals feel more compelled to behave consistent with their moral judgments. The motivation for moral action, then, stems directly from moral understanding; other facets of morality, such as emotion, play minor roles in this process.

Many contemporary approaches to morality stemming from Kohlberg's theory, such as Social Domain Theory [Turiel, 2002], similarly emphasize the role of cognition in moral functioning.

In contrast to cognitive approaches, Martin Hoffman outlined a theory focused on the role of moral emotion in morality [Hoffman, 1970, 2000]. Moral emotion is seen as the primary source of moral motivation. Specifically,

(...) abstract moral principles, learned in 'cool' didactic contexts (lectures, sermons), lack motive force. Empathy's contribution to moral principles is to transform them into pro-social hot cognitions – cognitive representations charged with empathic affect, thus giving them motive force. [Hoffman, 2000, p. 239]

So, while moral understanding helps focus and direct moral emotion, it is emotion that provides the motivating 'spark' that leads to action. Some other scholars also emphasize the role of emotion, although to a lesser extent than Hoffman [e.g., Eisenberg, 1986].

Most approaches to morality acknowledge the role of moral cognition and moral emotion in moral motivation, but differ in their stance on which is primary in the process of motivating moral behavior. Further, some more integrative perspectives suggest that moral cognition and moral emotion are interlinked, and that both can function as primary sources of moral motivation [e.g., Eisenberg, 1986; Gibbs, 2003]. This is more in line with research indicating the interconnected and inseparable nature of moral cognition and moral emotion [Damasio, 1994; Eisenberg, Shea, Carlo, & Knight, 1991]. However, there are conceptual and empirical reasons to question whether moral understanding and moral emotion, even when considered jointly, can adequately account for the motivation of moral action.

Conceptually, although moral cognitive-emotional sources of motivation can motivate moral action in some individuals in some situations, they cannot alone account for extraordinary moral action, consistent moral behavior, and enduring moral commitment. For this, it seems there might be moderating factors between moral cognitive-emotional motivation sources and moral action. As some scholars suggest [e.g., Eisenberg, 1986; Rest, 1983], in any given situation there are multiple motives compelling the individual towards different courses of action. A moral cognitive-emotional motive, then, will

likely be just one of several motives in a moral situation. Ultimately, the individual decides which of these motives to act on. Thus, he or she can choose whether or not to follow moral cognitive-emotional motives; the mere presence of these motives does not guarantee moral action will result. In fact, it is easy to conceptualize situations where individuals may know the right thing to do, feel emotionally prompted to take the moral course of action, but decide to do otherwise. Hence, moderators may exist that affect the relative importance of moral cognitive-emotional motives.

Empirically, research has generally shown moral reasoning [Blasi, 1980] and moral emotion [Eisenberg & Miller, 1987] to be positively associated with moral action, but only moderately. Thus, moral cognitive-emotional motives do not fully account for moral action; there is significant variability in moral behavior left unexplained. Given moderate relations between moral reasoning and action, Blasi [1980] became skeptical of Kohlberg's notion that moral judgment is directly linked to moral action, and urged scholars to search for potential moderating factors. The same can be said for links between moral emotion and moral action.

### *Identity as a Source of Moral Motivation*

In addition to moral understanding and moral emotion, some scholars have suggested that identity may play a role in motivating moral action [e.g., Blasi, 1983; Colby & Damon, 1992; Eisenberg, 1986; Gibbs, 2003; Hoffman, 2000; Kohlberg & Candee, 1984; Krebs & Van Hesteren, 1994; Monroe, 2001; Narvaez & Lapsley, in press; Nisan, 2004; Rest, 1983; Schwartz & Howard, 1982]. The various models proposed by these theorists are unified in suggesting that when morality is important and central to one's sense of self and identity, it heightens one's sense of obligation and responsibility to live consistent with one's moral concerns. Some also emphasize how the self-importance of morality is linked to the relative prioritization of moral values in one's value system, which impacts the likelihood of moral values being acted upon in moral situations [e.g., Blasi, 1983; Eisenberg, 1986; Narvaez & Lapsley, in press; Rest, 1983; Schwartz & Howard, 1982]. Further, identity is seen by some as a supplemental source of moral motivation that provides a boost beyond the motivation available from moral understanding and moral emotion alone; in this sense, it is

useful in explaining extraordinary moral action and enduring moral commitment [e.g., Blasi, 1983; Colby & Damon, 1992; Eisenberg, 1986; Gibbs, 2003; Hoffman, 2000].

Although several models of morality position a role for identity, Blasi's model of moral identity includes the most elaborated conception of identity [Blasi, 1988, 1993, 2004a; Blasi & Glodis, 1995], and the most detailed linkages between identity and moral functioning [Blasi, 1984, 1993, 1995, 2004b]. Thus Blasi's explanation of moral identity has been the most extensive and has yielded the most insight regarding mechanisms underlying moral identity as a source of moral motivation. While identity is central to Blasi's understanding of morality, in the models proposed by most other scholars it is more of an appendage [e.g., Eisenberg, 1986; Gibbs, 2003; Hoffman, 2000; Kohlberg & Candee, 1984; Krebs & Van Hesteren, 1994; Narvaez & Lapsley, in press; Rest, 1983]. Most other models emphasize the role of other facets of morality, such as moral understanding [Gibbs, 2003; Kohlberg & Candee, 1984; Krebs & Van Hesteren, 1994; Rest, 1983], moral emotion [Gibbs, 2003; Hoffman, 2000], and moral schemas [Narvaez & Lapsley, in press], and only minimally explicate the role of moral identity. Further, when discussing the place of identity in moral functioning, most other models of morality either draw on Blasi's model [e.g., Colby & Damon, 1992; Eisenberg, 1986; Gibbs, 2003; Kohlberg & Candee, 1984; Krebs & Van Hesteren, 1994; Monroe, 2001; Narvaez & Lapsley, in press; Nisan, 2004; Rest, 1983] or present ideas largely consistent with Blasi's [e.g., Hoffman, 2000; Schwartz & Howard, 1982]. Thus, we will use Blasi's ideas as a framework for our discussion of links between moral identity and moral action.

### *Blasi's Model of Moral Identity*

In an attempt to fill the gap between moral understanding and moral action left by Kohlberg's theory, Blasi [1983] proposed his Self Model of moral functioning. This model has three key components. First, before leading to moral action, a moral judgment can also pass through a judgment of responsibility, such that 'an action, evaluated as moral, is also judged to be strictly necessary for the individual' [Blasi, 1983, p. 198]. Hence, a person might not only decide the 'right' or 'moral' way to proceed in a given situation, but might also assess whether or not he or she feels responsible for acting on that judgment. Second,

the criteria for judgments of responsibility often stem from the structure of an individual's self. More specifically, what Blasi called moral identity reflects individual differences in the extent to which being moral is a central or essential characteristic of the sense of self. The third component of the Self Model is self-consistency. Blasi suggested there is a natural human tendency to want to live consistent with one's sense of self; hence, when one's self is centered on moral concerns, this inclination serves as a key motivating force for moral action. In summary, Blasi postulated that moral judgments might more reliably predict moral behavior if they are filtered through responsibility judgments based on moral identity, and propelled into action via the tendency toward self-consistency.

More recently Blasi [1993, 2004a; Blasi & Glodis, 1995] has elaborated ideas about the structure of identity that can help us understand the role of identity in morality. He posited there are 'two aspects that make up a concrete identity, namely the specific contents around which one's sense of self is constructed (moral ideals are one such content) and the modes in which identity is subjectively experienced, seem to be largely independent of each other, though not exactly orthogonal' [Blasi, 1993, p. 117]. Thus, similar to James' [1961/1892] notion of the me and the I, Blasi is calling attention to both an objective (identity content) and a subjective (identity experience) side of identity.

As subjective identity matures, several important changes occur [Blasi, 1988, 2001, 2004a; Blasi & Glodis, 1995; Blasi & Oresick, 1987]. The sense of self becomes based more on internal, psychological identity contents, such as values and goals, rather than external identity contents such as physical characteristics, relationships, and behaviors. Additionally, the self becomes more organized and unified. An important part of this is the hierarchical organization of identity contents such that some are chosen as more central and essential to one's sense of self than others. Subjective identity maturity also entails an increasing sense of agency over one's self, such that the identity contents one cares most about are actively appropriated into one's core self. This is coupled with a heightened sense of possession or ownership over one's identity, such that one feels responsible for protecting his or her identity and actualizing it in daily life. In other words, with mature subjective identity there is a greater desire for self-consistency; fidelity with one's core self is seen as a necessity, and self-inconsistency elicits intense negative affect.



Merging Blasi's ideas regarding the structure of identity with his framework for morality yields a model of how identity might serve as a source of motivation for moral action. In addition to understanding the objective importance of morality, for many people, moral concerns are also important to their sense of who they are. However, among these individuals with moral identity contents (e.g., moral values and goals), there is variability in identity experience. Blasi [1993] describes this issue as follows:

(...) several individuals may see morality as essential to their sense of self, of who they are. For some of them, however, moral ideals and demands happen to be there, a given of their nature over which they feel little control. In this case moral ideals exist next to other characteristics, all equally important simply because they are there. Others instead relate to their moral ideals as being personally chosen over other ideals or demands, sense their fragility, and feel responsible to protect them and to thus protect their sense of self. (p. 103)

Hence, links between moral identity contents and moral action might be moderated by subjective identity maturity. More specifically, the motivational force of moral identity contents should increase as they are actively appropriated into the core self. When moral concerns are self-appropriated, the heightened self-consistency motive and commitment to actualize one's core self (characteristic of mature subjective identity) can act as powerful sources of moral motivation.

### *Strengths and Limitations of Blasi's Model*

While a number of scholars have proposed a moral motivational role for the self, Blasi's approach has several strengths that seem to set it apart. First, more than other models, Blasi positions a central role for the self. Blasi argues that focusing on moral understanding and moral emotions provides a limited picture of moral motivation; the self's stance towards morality is also critically important. Further, as any adequate model of moral identity should, Blasi's fuses theoretical notions of morality and identity. His model includes an articulate conception of identity [Blasi, 2004a; Blasi & Glodis, 1995], complete with detailed bridges linking it to moral functioning [Blasi, 1993, 1995, in press]. This attention to detail and thorough coverage of both sides of moral identity sets Blasi's model apart from others.



Second, in blending his notions of identity with a self-based model of morality, Blasi has provided the most elaborated description of how identity motivates moral action. Specifically, Blasi delineates how maturation in experiential identity is associated with an increasing desire for one's life to remain consistent with one's inner sense of self [Blasi, 2004a; Blasi & Glodis, 1995; Blasi & Oresick, 1987], and when this inner self is centered on moral concerns, it can provide powerful moral motivation [Blasi, 1993, 1995, in press]. Most other morality models that include a role for the self provide minimal, if any, details regarding the structure of the self and mechanisms for linking it to moral functioning.

Third, Blasi's [2001, 2004a, in press] model paints a more agentic picture of morality, where individual differences in moral desires, rather than differences in morally-relevant capacities (e.g., empathy, moral reasoning, or moral schemas), are the root of individual differences in moral behavior. Agentic views on the self are becoming increasingly popular among contemporary theorists as they realize the important implications of such views [Little, Snyder, & Wehmeyer, in press]. According to Blasi [2001, 2004a], identity maturity is associated with an increasing sense of agency, which leads individuals to appropriate certain aspects of themselves (e.g., values, goals, personality traits, and emotions) as central to their sense of self, while merely accepting or even rejecting others. This process produces feelings of ownership over those aspects chosen as core identity contents, along with a sense of obligation and commitment to protect and actualize them. Individuals are not simply receptacles that obtain moral understanding through cognitive development and socialization; rather, they selectively and deliberately infuse moral values with personal importance by integrating them into their sense of self. An agentic view of moral identity, such as Blasi's, is critical because it gives individuals more control over and responsibility for their own morality, and with this, holds them more accountable for it.

Lastly, by founding his moral identity model firmly on moral understanding, Blasi [2004b] ensures that the moral identity he describes is truly 'moral.' Essentially, when one has a moral identity:

One continues to behave morally because moral norms and ideals are good and desirable; but, in addition, because acting against one's core commitments would be a self-betrayal and damaging to one's sense of self. The desire to maintain one's

identity and to be consistent with it does not corrupt the nature of morality because moral identity was constructed on the person's caring about morality as it objectively is. [Blasi, 2004b, p. 343]

Thus, one need not be concerned, as some have suggested [Nucci, 2004], that Blasi is proposing a form of 'ethical egoism.' Blasi is not merely posing the desire for self-consistency as a source of moral motivation; rather, moral action is motivated by a desire to remain consistent with one's identity as a moral person, concerned about morality.

Blasi's insightful and intriguing ideas regarding identity and morality have inspired interest in moral identity, and are beginning to spur empirical investigation into this facet of morality [Lapsley & Narvaez, 2004a]. Still, there are several areas in which the model could be extended. First, it is unclear how Blasi's moral identity model applies to moral behaviors that are to some degree automatic and less deliberate. Blasi [1999] insists, consistent with the principle of phenomenalism, that behavior, to be considered 'moral,' must stem intentionally from conscious moral reasons. Yet, if as Lapsley and Narvaez (in press) argue, much of daily social cognitive functioning is tacit and automatic, then strict adherence to phenomenalism drastically reduces the moral domain to behaviors that are fairly uncommon to everyday life. Blasi [2004b] has acknowledged that although morality must be grounded in moral understanding, the type of moral understanding required for behavior to be considered moral may be 'implicit and un-verbalized' (p. 339). However, more discussion of the processes linking moral identity to the more implicit modes of moral functioning would be helpful.

Second, in Blasi's model, identity does not typically emerge as an important source of moral motivation until young adulthood. Moral motivation stemming from identity results when a mature identity is centered on moral concerns. However, the form of subjective identity necessary to provide a strong desire to maintain consistency with one's sense of self as a moral person is not typically experienced until at least adolescence, and even thereafter, is not present in the majority of individuals. For most people, particularly prior to adulthood, morality is not motivated by identity; rather, it will stem from other concerns, such as the desire to uphold moral principles. But, as Blasi [1984, 1995, 2004b] indicates, these other moral motives may be less compelling than moral identity and, therefore, less reliable in their

ability to yield moral behavior. Thus, Blasi's model could be extended by a discussion of the ways moral concerns may be integrated into personality, in addition to appropriation into identity, that will enrich our understanding of moral motivation and commitment at earlier ages [Blasi, 1993, 2001].

Third, Blasi's moral identity model does not include adequate discussion of developmental processes and antecedents. In line with Damon's [1984] observation, Blasi [1995] assumes that identity and morality are two psychological systems that initially develop independently and later become integrated or united in some individuals during or following adolescence; yet this integrative process has not been sufficiently detailed. In terms of identity, Blasi [1988, 2001, 2004a; Blasi & Glodis, 1995] outlined a series of developmentally ordered modes of experiential identity, but has only minimally discussed the processes of individual developmental progression, and has not addressed factors that may facilitate or hinder these processes. Moreover, Blasi has given little discussion to why and how some individuals center their identity on moral concerns, but others do not. Greater attention to these issues might make Blasi's model more complete and more practically useful.

Lastly, Blasi's model might be enriched by further detailing the role of emotion. The importance of emotion in identity [Bosma & Kunnien, 2001] and morality [Carlo, in press; Hoffman, 2000] has been noted by others. Although Blasi [in press] does emphasize the place of affective components such as motivation and desire, it is sometimes unclear what role emotions play. For example, it would be helpful to know how moral emotions, such as empathy, might be involved in moral identity formation and in linking identity to action.

Blasi's model is by no means the final word on moral identity; rather, we propose it as a good starting point for further investigation into moral motivation, and more specifically links between identity and morality. To this end, we feel it is deserving of more attention by those interested in moral functioning. As yet, Blasi's notions have been the subject of little empirical research. Further, there has been a lack of critical dialogue pertaining to Blasi's ideas [for exceptions, see Monroe, 2001; Nucci, 2004; Turiel, 2002]. Thus, we advocate more conceptual and empirical examination of Blasi's model.

## **Moral Identity and Moral Action: An Empirical Review**

The notion of moral identity has thus far primarily attracted theoretical and philosophical attention rather than empirical research. It is unclear why this is the case. Possibly the abstract and complex nature of identity and morality has made moral identity overly difficult to operationalize and systematically examine. Additionally, Kohlberg's cognitive developmental paradigm continues to overwhelm other emergent approaches to morality. Regardless, the fact is that we have very little empirical research that has directly investigated and validated the moral identity construct. Much of the evidence that we do have is reviewed below, and provides some validation for the position that identity may play an important role in moral motivation.

### *Studies of Moral Exemplars*

Some scholars study moral commitment through detailed examination of morally exemplary individuals, at times comparing them to non-exemplars [e.g., Colby & Damon, 1992; Hart & Fegley, 1995; Matsuba & Walker, 2004; Monroe, 2004; Oliner & Oliner, 1988; Reimer, 2003; Reimer & Wade-Stein, 2004]. Often insight can be gleaned from these studies regarding the role of moral identity in moral motivation. For example, Colby and Damon [1992] concluded from their in-depth exploration of adult moral exemplars (nominated by philosophers, scholars, theologians, and religious leaders) that individuals whose lives are devoted to moral causes tend to experience unity between their self and moral goals such that, 'their own interests [are] synonymous with their moral goals' (p. 299). These individuals exemplify Blasi's [in press] moral identity in that they seemed to have constructed their identities around morality to the point that there was no struggle to reconcile their moral principles and commitments with their personal goal and desires or other aspects of their identities. For, as Blasi [2001] states, 'the apex of moral motivation (...) is to desire the morally good in the same way one desires what satisfies one's most intimate and deepest needs' (p. 319). Colby and Damon [1992] note that this fusion of morality and self is likely evident to some degree in most adults, but in moral exemplars it is more of a complete unity.

Other studies have compared adolescent moral exemplars (nominated by community leaders) to non-exemplar teens. For example, Hart and Fegley [1995] administered a semi-structured interview measure of self-concept to 15 exemplars and 15 comparison teens. They discovered that adolescent moral exemplars more frequently used moral personality traits (e.g., honest) and moral goals (e.g., help others) to describe themselves than comparison teens. Reimer and Wade-Stein [2004] reported similar findings from their study which used a sophisticated computational model (Latent Semantic Analysis) to compare self-descriptors with self-representations in semantic space. Self-related perceptions were gathered from 15 adolescent moral exemplars and 15 comparison teens using a semi-structured interview similar to that used by Hart and Fegley [1995]. Of the self-descriptors most closely associated with the actual self-representations of the participants (the type of person they currently are), a greater portion was positive, moral, or caring among the exemplars than the comparison teens. Results of these studies seem in line with Blasi's [1995] conception of moral identity in that the salient self-representations of teens who exhibited high levels of moral commitment and action were more morally based than those of comparison teens. However, self-representations seem to only capture a small piece of the essence of Blasi's moral identity. In other words, self-representations reflect how one sees oneself, not necessarily what one sees as most central or important to one's sense of self. Further, self-representations largely tap identity contents; hence, the subjective side of Blasi's moral identity is not adequately accounted for in these studies.

In short, while many people might understand the objective importance of moral concerns, individuals who exhibit high levels of commitment to moral causes are more likely than others to construct their self-concept and identity around these moral concerns. Not only do moral exemplars define themselves in moral terms, but their personal desires are in line with their moral principles. Because of this, they are compelled to live according to moral principles such that they feel they can do no other, and the thought of betraying these principles is aversive. Thus, studies of moral exemplars provide some support for Blasi's [2004b, in press] notion that the self-importance and identity centrality of moral concerns might serve as a motive capable of sustaining stable and substantial moral commitment.

*Studies of Moral Identity and Moral Behavior*

Rather than using moral commitment and behavior as a criterion for sample selection, as in exemplar studies, other researchers have measured moral identity as an a-priori predictor of moral behavior. For example, Arnold [1993] examined links between the self-importance of morality and moral behavior among adolescents. Moral self was assessed using the Good-Self Assessment, which involved a pictorial-self task adapted from Harter and Monsour [1992]. As part of this task participants were first presented with a diagram of three concentric circles, each corresponding to a different degree of centrality to the self. Then, they were given a zip-lock bag containing 16 labels, each with a different virtue written on it; some of the virtues were moral (e.g., fair to others), while others were not (e.g., creative). Participants were then asked to place each label in the appropriate circle in order to indicate those virtues that are most central, less central, and least central to who they are (only three labels could be placed in the innermost circle). In addition, participants were interviewed and asked for reasons why they selected the three most central virtues as the most important to them. Based on the placement of the virtue labels, a 6-point moral identification scale was created to reflect the degree to which adolescents identified more with moral, as opposed to non-moral virtues. Also, a scale for moral motivation was created based on the extent to which participants gave 'moral' reasons for choosing their central virtues. Moral behavior was assessed using the Ethical Behavior Rating Scale [Hill & Swanson, 1985], a teacher-report measure of various morally-relevant behavioral tendencies (sample item: 'Speaks out for fairness for others as well as self'). Analyses revealed that both moral identification and moral motivation positively predicted moral behavior. Thus, teens who selected moral virtues as central to their sense of self and gave moral reasons for caring about these virtues were reported as exhibiting higher levels of moral behavior.

A more recent study examined behavioral correlates of moral self longitudinally among late adolescents [Pratt, Hunsberger, Pancer, & Alisat, 2003]. Participants were presented 12 values and asked to rate the extent to which each 'should be important for them in their lives' (6 moral and 6 non-moral values). To create a moral self-scale, the total for the non-moral values was subtracted from the total for the moral values. The outcome measure was a community involvement



scale that assessed frequency of involvement in community (e.g., volunteering with service organization), political (e.g., collecting signatures for a petition), responding (e.g., giving money), and helping (e.g., visiting the sick) activities. Moral self at Time 1 was positively associated with overall community involvement at Time 1 as well as with the four subscales of community involvement. Further, Time 2 moral self was positively correlated with overall community involvement at Time 2 and with three of the four subscales (moral self was not significantly associated with political activities). Longitudinally, Time 1 moral self did not significantly predict Time 2 community involvement (controlling for Time 1 community involvement). However, Time 1 community involvement was positively associated with Time 2 moral self (controlling for Time 1 moral self). The strongest link was between helping activities and later moral self. These findings are in line with Youniss and Yates' [1997] work in suggesting that, although there might be a positive link between moral self and prosocial behavior, involvement in prosocial activities may precede the importance of moral values to the self.

Aquino and Reed [2002] have explored links between moral identity and various moral behaviors in adults. They conceptualize moral identity as a form of social identity as well as 'a self-conception organized around a set of moral traits' (p. 1424). Thus they assume that although the content of individual moral identities may differ somewhat (e.g., an emphasis on caring versus justice), there 'exists a set of common moral traits likely to be central to most people's moral self-definitions' [Aquino & Reed, 2002, p. 1424]. Hence, they argue that, 'to measure moral identity, it should not be necessary, in principle, to discover the entire universe of traits that might compose a person's unique moral identity. Rather, all that is needed to invoke and subsequently measure the self-importance of a person's moral identity is to activate a subset of moral traits that are linked to other moral traits that may be more central to a particular person's self-concept' [Aquino & Reed, 2002, pp 1424f.].

Through a series of several different studies, Aquino and Reed [2002] created a 10-item questionnaire for assessing moral identity in adults. This self-report paper-and-pencil measure involves (1) presenting participants with a list of nine moral traits, (2) asking them to visualize a person with those traits (their self or someone else) and how that person would think, feel, and act, and (3) having them rate



statements such as, 'It would make me feel good to be a person who has these characteristics.' Based on the properties of identity outlined by Erikson [1964], Aquino and Reed [2002] identified two 5-item subscales: one to indicate 'the respondent's actions in the world' (labeled symbolization) and another to tap 'the degree to which the moral traits are central to the self-concept' (labeled internalization).

Aquino, Reed, and colleagues have conducted several studies to assess the validity of their measure and its ability to predict moral behavior. For example, among college alumni, they reported that both internalization and symbolization positively predicted self-report volunteerism (controlling for age, gender, and social desirability) [Aquino & Reed, 2002]. However, among adolescents, internalization but not symbolization was significantly positively related to actual donation behavior. In follow-up studies, moral identity, particularly the internalization dimension, has been positively related to various morally relevant social (e.g., inter-group relations, such as regard for out-group members) [Reed & Aquino, 2003] and negatively associated with lying in business negotiations [Aquino, Ray, & Reed, 2003].

A final study with implications for moral identity examined links between moral self and antisocial behavior in late adolescents [Barriga, Morrison, Liao, & Gibbs, 2001]. Using an adapted version of Arnold's [1993] Good-Self Assessment, Barriga et al. [2001] assessed moral self-relevance, defined as 'the centrality to the self-concept of moral virtues' (p. 542). This measure included 8 moral and 8 non-moral virtues. The moral self-relevance scale was created by subtracting the average ratings on the non-moral virtues from the average on the moral virtues. Antisocial behavior was measured using the Externalizing Behaviors Subscale from Achenbach's parent-report Child Behavior Checklist and self-report Youth Self-Report Form. Moral self-relevance was negatively associated with antisocial behavior (externalizing), controlling for gender, internalizing behaviors, self-serving cognitive distortion, and moral judgment.

In summary, although the research on moral identity and behavioral outcomes is sparse, results thus far generally validate Blasi's conception of moral identity as a source of moral motivation. Specifically, teens and adults who reported moral values and virtues as being more important to their self-concept or more central to their identity also more frequently engaged in moral behavior. However, although the moral identity measures in these studies provide a window into

individuals' identity contents, they do not adequately account for the more experiential aspects of identity emphasized by Blasi, such as unity and organization, or conative facets such as agency and the desire for self-consistency [Blasi, 2004b, in press]. Thus, although these studies suggest moral identity may be able to motivate moral behavior, they provide limited information regarding how and why.

Conclusions drawn from results of studies on moral identity and behavior should be tentative for two reasons. First, regarding effect sizes for relations between moral self and behavior, only effects reported by Arnold [1993] were relatively large ( $\eta$  values of 0.47–0.60); effects for all other studies were small to moderate ( $\eta$  values of 0.07–0.27). It is unclear whether there is a conceptual reason for this variability in effect sizes or whether it is due to differences in methodology or sample characteristics. Second, work by Pratt et al. [2003] and others [Youniss & Yates, 1997] reminds us that the direction of causality between moral identity and moral behavior is still unclear. While moral identity might motivate moral action, these studies suggest that, at least in adolescence, involvement in moral action may precede moral identity development. Bidirectional relations between moral identity and behavior also seem plausible, in that involvement in moral action may promote moral identity development, which then motivates subsequent moral behavior and commitment. This possibility is not incongruous with Blasi's [2001] ideas on moral identity, for Blasi argues that mature moral identity is rare prior to late adolescence and young adulthood. However, thus far, there is no firm evidence that moral identity precedes or causes moral behavior, and insufficient evidence to support the inverse relation. In short, empirical investigation of moral identity is just beginning, leaving much work to be done before any conclusions can be drawn.

#### *Other Relevant Research*

Other areas of research not specifically directed at understanding moral identity also provide support for the notion of moral identity as a motivation for moral behavior. For example, attributional research has found that children given prosocial character attributions by caregivers are more likely to behave pro-socially and thus act consistent with their attributed self-concept as prosocial individuals [Grusec & Redler, 1980]. Additionally, according to Deci and Ryan [1991], when

individuals internalize certain values, they ‘fully assimilate them (...) accept them as their own, and bring them into consistent relation to the other needs, processes, and values that represent self’ (p. 255). In line with this, it was found that children’s prosocial internalization was positively associated with empathy and relatedness with others [Ryan & Connell, 1989]. Lastly, Verplanken and Holland [2002] conducted a series of experiments on value centrality, defined as when certain values ‘make up part of one’s self-definition and, thus, contribute to one’s sense of identity’ (p. 435). Their findings indicated that value-congruent behavior only results when values are both central to the self and are activated (i.e., brought to one’s attention or made more accessible); however, they suggested that such activation occurs frequently in everyday situations. For example, they found that altruistic values were related to donating behavior only if they were central to the self, and only for participants in an enhanced self-focus condition of the experiment. From this series of studies they concluded that ‘the self might function as a crucial structure that mediates between values and behavior’ [Verplanken & Holland, 2002, p. 444]. In short, congruent with Blasi’s [1995; in press] model of moral identity, these areas of research demonstrate the importance of the self, and the values and attributes it is comprised of, in motivating moral action.

## **Future Directions for Research on Moral Identity**

### *Unanswered Questions*

The concept of moral identity emerged in the social sciences literature over two decades ago, largely spurred by Blasi’s [1980, 1983, 1984] work in the early 1980s. However, although Blasi set the stage for conceptual discussion of moral identity, empirical research on moral identity has been slow in coming; thus, the field must continue to move beyond mere philosophizing and theorizing about moral identity to a more thoughtful and innovative empirical examination of the construct. As scholars embark on this effort, there are several specific questions that seem most urgent. A few of these are discussed below.

First, what is the causal nature of relations between moral identity and moral behavior? Most work on moral identity presents it as a source of motivation for, and thus a precursor of, moral action.

However, longitudinal studies have yielded information that suggests relations between moral identity and moral action may be complex. Specifically, Pratt et al. [2003] found that, whereas moral self did not predict later community involvement among adolescents, the inverse effect was significant, in that community involvement predicted subsequent moral self. These results echo the qualitative findings reported by Youniss and Yates [1997] in their study of the youth service learning program. Both studies reported results that suggest positive associations between moral identity and moral action, at least in adolescence, may be due to the influence of moral action on one's identity rather than the other way around. However, these studies were restricted to adolescence; thus, the conclusion that the effect from moral action to moral identity may be stronger than the inverse (identity to action), may primarily be true for this age period, during which identity formation is occurring. It is possible that relations between moral identity and moral behavior are bidirectional in that involvement in moral action influences moral identity formation, and moral identity subsequently acts as a source of moral motivation and commitment [Davidson & Youniss, 1991; Youniss & Yates, 1997]. More longitudinal work is needed to further untangle the nature of causal relations between moral identity and moral action. Moreover, moral identity research thus far has been nonexperimental; hence, causal interpretation of results should be tentative and future experimental or quasi-experimental research is welcome.

Second, what mechanisms link moral identity to moral action? A few scholars have outlined ideas that provide a good starting point for understanding this issue. For example, as discussed earlier, Blasi's [1983, 1984, 1993, 1995, 2004b] work provides one perspective on how moral identity might act as a source of moral motivation. His Self-Model of moral functioning positions identity as a possible mediating factor between moral understanding and moral action [Blasi, 1983]. Additionally, his ideas about the structure of identity help us understand how it might be able to provide the motivational spark for moral action, with a focus on the role of the need for self-consistency that increases as a function of subjective identity maturity [Blasi, 1993, 2004a; Blasi & Glodis, 1995; Blasi & Milton, 1991; Blasi & Oresick, 1987; Glodis & Blasi, 1993]. Essentially, one has a moral identity to the extent that he or she has actively constructed an identity centered on moral concerns, providing a strong sense of obligation and commitment to living consistent with these concerns.

Additionally, Lapsley and Narvaez [2004b; Narvaez & Lapsley, in press] have posited a social-cognitive mechanism for linking moral identity to moral behavior. A focal point of their perspective is the notion that individuals have schemas (i.e., cognitive-affective structures) that guide how they perceive of, interpret, and respond to their social environment. For schemas to be utilized in social contexts, they must be accessible or readily activated. Regarding morality, 'a person who has a moral identity (...) would be one for whom moral constructs are chronically accessible and easily activated for social information-processing' [Lapsley & Narvaez, 2004b, pp. 200f]. As a practical example, consider a woman whose identity is centered on kindness, and whose conception of kindness includes holding doors open for other people when entering a building. According to Lapsley and Narvaez, this woman would likely have readily available kindness schemas in place such that she would not need to consciously deliberate about each opportunity to hold a door for another, but could function largely automatically in many situations.

One moral schema that may be of particular importance to moral functioning is the individual's understanding of what it means to be a moral person [Lapsley & Laskey, 2001; Walker & Hennig, 2004; Walker & Pitts, 1998]. These conceptions of moral personality may form cognitive prototypes capable of impacting social information processing in moral situations [Lapsley & Laskey, 2001; Walker & Hennig, 2004]. Moreover, the cognitive accessibility of these moral prototypes for information processing may be proportional to their importance to the individual's identity [Lapsley & Narvaez, 2004b]. When one's moral prototype is central to one's sense of self, there may be increased motivation to live consistent with this conception of what it means to be moral. Overlap between one's moral prototype and ideal or desired self may similarly compel moral action, as well as drive moral growth, as seen in the lives of many of the moral exemplars studied by Colby and Damon [1992]. In short, the moral schema literature, along with the moral identity literature, offer some insight into links between identity and morality [for an additional perspective, see Monroe, 2001]. Yet, little empirical validation of these ideas has occurred. Elucidation of the mechanisms linking identity to morality is central to work on moral identity; therefore, conceptual and empirical investigation into this issue is strongly urged.

Third, what factors might mediate or moderate links between moral identity and moral action? Even when moral principles are

central to the self, they do not always lead directly and consistently to the moral behavior which they dictate. Scholars have noted that it is possible for individuals to act contrary to their sense of identity [e.g., Blasi, 1983]. Thus, there must be certain factors that lie between moral identity and moral behavior.

First, individuals must decide to act on their moral identity. Even though, for example, a man may have judged that helping another is the most moral thing to do in a certain situation, and decided that he is personally responsible (based on his identity) for helping in that situation, he will still need to decide to help. Therefore, the final decision is the decision of behavioral intention. Gollwitzer [1993] submits behavior intentions are proximal causes of behavior, and notes that, 'Whereas the attitude represents an evaluation of the action, the respective intention is seen as the result of a decision to execute this action' (p. 145). So, although moral judgment and moral identity may be seen as attitudes that influence behavior, ultimately a decision of behavioral intention must be made, and in any given situation there are multiple influences on this decision [Eisenberg, 1986; Nisan, 2004; Nucci, 2004; Turiel, 2002]. Rest [1983] describes this as the choice to prioritize the moral ideal over other concerns. For example, a teenage girl sees an unpopular boy getting bullied, and knows that the right thing to do would be to help the boy. She also feels a sense of obligation to help. However, there is the fear that she will get injured in trying to help the boy. Also, other peers are present, and not only is she shy, but, since the victim is unpopular, helping him could tarnish her image. Finally, she is late for her next class, and there is an important test that day. As Social Domain Theorists remind us, and this example illustrates, moral situations are complex [Nucci, 2004; Turiel, 2002]. Hence, moral identity must operate in the midst of many factors, both individual and contextual. Individuals will not always choose to act consistent with their moral identity; as a result, they will most likely experience negative affective consequences [e.g., guilt; Blasi, 1983].

If one decides to act on one's moral understanding and moral identity, there are still factors that may preclude the moral action from actually happening. More specifically, an individual may have a moral identity and strong moral intentions, but lack the necessary skills to follow through with those intentions [e.g., self-regulation; Blasi, 1983, 1995; Kohlberg & Candee, 1984]. Thus, although moral identity might be an important and often neglected piece of the puzzle of



moral functioning, it is by no means the only piece [Nucci, 2004]. It is but one factor in a multitude of factors that influence the likelihood of individuals engaging in moral behavior. As such, research should expand beyond examining bivariate links between moral identity and moral action, and consider relations between these two constructs in the contexts in which they occur. Also, it would be interesting to explore the role of moral identity in decisions of intention to act morally [Nucci, 2004].

Fourth, how does moral identity relate to everyday, more automatic, less reflective moral behavior? Most models of morality are primarily designed to account for moral action that is more deliberate – the result of moral reflection and judgment; but, the majority of moral action is likely more spontaneous or habitual [Davidson & Yooniss, 1991; Haidt, 2001; Lapsley & Narvaez, in press; Walker, 2004]. Moral growth may largely be a matter of becoming more adept and fluid at moral functioning, and a key factor in this process might be the progressive integration of individuals' moral and self-systems [Colby & Damon, 1992; Davidson & Yooniss, 1991; Narvaez & Lapsley, in press; Lapsley & Narvaez, 2004b]. This is evidenced by studies revealing the extensive spontaneous moral actions and unhesitating moral commitments of moral exemplars [Colby & Damon, 1992; Monroe, 2004]. One possible mechanism for this is that moral identity might entail having cognitively accessible moral schemas capable of carrying out some aspects of moral functioning largely outside of consciousness [Lapsley & Laskey, 2001; Lapsley & Narvaez, 2004b; Narvaez & Lapsley, in press; Walker & Hennig, 2004]. Additionally, when an individual has a moral identity such that he or she strongly desires to be a moral person, it provides fertile ground to nurture moral instincts and foster moral habits [Colby & Damon, 1992; Davidson & Yooniss, 1991]. The field will benefit greatly from efforts to better understand how moral identity leads to greater facility and spontaneity of morality.

Fifth, how is moral identity related to prohibitive morality? Moral identity research has primarily focused on understanding links between moral identity and prosocial behavior and commitment [e.g., Aquino & Reed, 2002; Arnold, 1993; Colby & Damon, 1992; Hart & Fegley, 1995; Reimer & Wade-Stein, 2004; Pratt et al., 2003; Reed & Aquino, 2003], with few exceptions [e.g., Aquino, Ray, & Reed, 2003; Barriga et al., 2001]. Furthermore, conceptual discussions of moral identity generally seem more targeted at understanding moral identity



as a source of motivation for action rather than inaction [e.g., Blasi, 1995]. However, morality involves both prescriptions and prohibitions (i.e., principles dictating action and inaction) [Turiel, 2002] within multiple dimensions, e.g., care and justice [Nunner-Winkler, 1984]. Hence, moral identity may motivate individuals to behave pro-socially towards others as well as to avoid behaving antisocially towards them. Yet at present, we know little about how moral identity relates to prohibitive morality, and whether it is differentially linked to prescriptive and prohibitive morality. By expanding this research to a broader array of morally relevant behaviors and contexts, we will gain a fuller picture of the role of moral identity in moral functioning.

Sixth, how does moral identity relate to other aspects of moral personality, such as moral understanding and moral emotion? In response to the dominance of the narrowly-focused cognitive developmental approach to morality, an increasing number of scholars in recent years have pushed for more integrative views of moral functioning [Blasi, 1995; Carlo, *in press*; Eisenberg, 1986; Gibbs, 2003; Lapsley & Narvaez, 2004a; Walker & Hennig, 1997]. In large part this is a movement towards a more holistic interest in moral personality and in interconnections between the different facets of moral personality, such as moral understanding, moral emotion, moral identity, and moral behavior. It is likely that moving forward in this regard will require new ways of thinking, and as Lapsley and Narvaez [*in press*] have declared, 'productive lines of moral psychological research in the "post-Kohlbergian era" will be found by searching for integrative possibilities with other domains of psychological research.' As an example of this, Lapsley and Narvaez [2004b] drew from the social cognition and information-processing literatures to develop their integrative model of moral personality that emphasizes the role of cognitive-affective moral schemas in all components of moral functioning (perception, judgment, motivation, and action).

Of particular interest are the interrelations between moral identity, moral understanding, and moral emotion, and their relative roles in motivating moral action. Gibbs [2003] recently discussed these three facets of morality as the three primacies of moral motivation. However, despite occasional acknowledgement by scholars that reasoning, emotion, and identity are all important to moral functioning, little has been done to empirically explicate links between these three facets and to understand their relative role in relation to moral

behavior. Part of the difficulty is that cognition, emotion, and identity are overlapping constructs and dimensions of human functioning [Damasio, 1994; Eisenberg et al., 1991; Reimer, 2003]. Therefore, successful examination of these issues will likely require diverse, creative, and innovative methodological approaches.

One approach to understanding personality correlates of moral identity is through in-depth exploration of moral exemplars, and comparing exemplars to non-exemplary individuals. As an example, Matsuba and Walker [2004] compared 40 young adult moral exemplars to 40 comparison individuals on personality traits, adult attachment, ego identity, moral reasoning, and faith development; they found partial support for relations between these facets of personality and moral exemplarity. To the degree that moral exemplars have identities centered on morality, these results indicate potential personality correlates of moral identity. However, moral identity was not directly assessed; thus, implications of this research for moral identity are tentative. Still, exemplar research is the sort of methodological approach with promise for elucidating the place of moral identity in moral personality.

Seventh, how does moral identity develop? We know little about the processes by which moral identity develops. Several scholars have proposed that moral identity development occurs as the moral and self-systems, separate in childhood, become integrated or unified in adolescence [Bergman, 2002; Blasi, 1995, 2001; Colby & Damon, 1992; Damon, 1984, 2000; Nucci, 2001]. There is some empirical support for this claim. For example, research on self-understanding development from childhood through adolescence has revealed that moral principles are seldom used as self-descriptors until adolescence [Damon & Hart, 1988]. When children do use moral self-descriptors, they tend to be positive (e.g., 'good' or 'nice') and refer to the child's external behavior [Damon & Hart, 1988; Power & Khmelkov, 1998]. Use of moral terms in a self-evaluative or self-critical manner is infrequent prior to adolescence [Power & Khmelkov, 1998]; and, according to Nucci [2001], this capacity is necessary for the self to serve as a source of moral motivation. Additionally, while young children may have a basic understanding of moral rules, they often lack the motivation and sense of self-responsibility to act on them [Blasi, 1995, 2001; Keller & Edelstein, 1993; Nunner-Winkler, 1998].

Little is known about the processes by which the separate developing systems of self and morality become united in some individuals,

but some scholars have proffered ideas about how this might proceed [Blasi, 1993, 1995, 2001, in press; Damon, 1984, 2000; Keller & Edelstein, 1993; see also Deci & Ryan, 1991]. As children start to reflect on how their characteristics and behaviors affect others, they begin to view themselves in moral terms (e.g., kind, honest, or fair). Further, through interactions with peers, parents, and others, children to varying degrees develop appreciation and concern for morality; hence, moral ideals become not only understood as objectively important, but important to them personally. These processes seem to signal the start of the integration of morality and self. The pinnacle of this integration is when, in adolescence or adulthood, some individuals construct a unified identity around a core of deeply rooted moral concerns. In short, as Blasi [1993] suggests, moral understanding and concern for morality likely develop early, and what changes after that is the relation between this developing morality and one's identity. Work is needed to further elucidate the developmental processes of moral identity formation, including examination of the emergence of concern for morality, subjective identity maturation, and the self-appropriation of moral concerns.

Eighth, what factors influence moral identity development? Identifying factors that foster moral identity development is imperative; this sort of knowledge may be invaluable to moral education and youth development efforts. Yet, little conceptual or empirical work has been done to reveal such factors. Most work directly relevant to this issue has been led by Daniel Hart [for a review of much of this work, see Hart, in press]. Hart and colleagues have proposed, refined, and begun to empirically examine, a model of predictors of moral identity development. This model posits five factors that influence moral identity formation. Two factors (the first layer of the model), personality and social structure (e.g., socioeconomic status), are stable, resistant to change, largely beyond the individual's control, and are the foundation for many aspects of child and adolescent development. The other three factors (the second layer of the model) more directly influence and constitute moral identity, and are more malleable and under the individual's control: moral cognitions (e.g., moral judgments and attitudes), self and identity, and opportunities for moral action. Personality and social structure influence moral identity development directly as well as indirectly by way of these second-layer factors. Using national datasets, with voluntary community service as a marker

for moral identity, Hart and colleagues have found support for their model [Atkins, Hart, & Donnelly, 2004; Hart, *in press*; Hart & Atkins, 2004; Hart, Atkins, & Ford, 1998, 1999].

Others have echoed Hart's [*in press*] supposition that engagement in moral action can lead to integration of morality into one's identity [Damon, 2000; Youniss & Yates, 1997]. In particular, Youniss and Yates [1997] found evidence for this notion in their ethnographic study of a youth service learning program. As part of a high school social justice course, 160 students were required to work at an inner-city soup kitchen. In-class discussion and course assignments probed students to reflect on moral ideals and their practical application. Then, service at the soup kitchen provided opportunities for them to experience themselves acting on those moral ideals. Youniss and Yates did not specifically assess moral identity at any point during their study. However, they reported that, over time, the youth involved in this program became aware of and reflected on moral and social issues transcendent to themselves, such as homelessness, and began to see themselves as agents capable of and responsible for making a difference and improving the well-being of others. During this process of reflection and action, it seemed that many of these youth were integrating moral ideologies and moral commitments into their developing identities.

Additionally, some have suggested interaction in positive peer relationships facilitates moral identity development [Davidson & Youniss, 1991; Keller & Edelstein, 1993]. According to Davidson and Youniss [1991], peer relationships, more characterized by equality and cooperation than relationships with adults, provide children and youth with the experience of interacting according to the reciprocity norm. This helps them progress from heteronomous egocentrism to autonomous moral judgment and autonomous self-conscious personality. Thus, development in morality and identity is interconnected, and both arise largely from early peer relationships. Similarly, Keller and Edelstein [1993] posit that in peer relationships, children become aware of the consequences their actions have for others. They come to realize that the morality of their actions and their self is continually evaluated by others. This leads to the development of a system for self-evaluation of one's actions and self-based on one's moral ideals. Individuals are then motivated, based on felt and anticipated positive and negative self-evaluative affect, to act consistent with their moral ideals and the

moral image of themselves they want to reach or maintain. In short, peer interaction fosters socio-moral understanding and the development of a sense of moral self-responsibility.

Lastly, some suggest that certain aspects of the family context, such as parenting styles and practices, might have an impact on identity formation [Grotevant, 1998] as well as the internalization of values [Grolnick, Deci, & Ryan, 1997]. In particular, democratic parenting which provides a caring and supportive environment that encourages autonomy may facilitate adolescents' identity development and the integration of values into their emerging identities. Additionally, studies of moral exemplars point to the importance of family context in the development of moral identity [Colby & Damon, 1992; Oliner & Oliner, 1988]. Future studies should more systematically identify characteristics of family contexts most conducive to moral identity development.

### *Methodological Considerations*

As researchers embark on empirical examination of links between identity and morality, and explore important questions such as those detailed above, they are urged to consider a few recommendations. First, much more attention needs to be paid to the operationalization and measurement of moral identity. Thus far, there have been several approaches to moral identity assessment, each with its own strengths and limitations. Some researchers tally the relative frequency with which morally relevant terms are used in self-descriptions [e.g., Hart & Fegley, 1995; Reimer & Wade-Steiner, 2004], have participants rate the degree to which certain moral values are central to their sense of self [e.g., Arnold, 1993; Pratt et al., 2003], or use other similar approaches [e.g., Aquino & Reed, 2002]. These measures seem to essentially be assessing the relevance of morality to the self-as-object (or self-concept), which corresponds to the facet of Blasi's identity that we have referred to as identity content. While this is a significant part of moral identity to Blasi [2004; Blasi & Glodis, 1995] and others [e.g., Moshman, 2005], identity is more advanced and complex than self-concept; thus, much of what might be involved in moral identity (e.g., subjective identity maturity) is being overlooked in these studies. Therefore, to suggest that these are all studies of moral identity either indicates differing conceptions of moral identity or a partial disconnection between the researchers' conceptualizations and measures

of moral identity. An additional limitation of measures such as these is that they assume individuals have ready access to their moral identities; however, access to one's cognitive schemata is complex [Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980], and individuals sometimes distort their self-meanings [Moshman, 2004].

Some scholars have used other methods to indirectly assess moral identity, possibly due to the challenges and limitations of using objective measures. For example, Hart and colleagues [Hart, in press] have in several studies used voluntary community service as a marker of moral identity. In other research, moral exemplars are nominated by community leaders, and their moral exemplar status is used as an indication of moral identity [e.g., Matsuba & Walker, 2004; Reimer, 2003]. These methods for assessing moral identity seem capable of getting at more of the richness and complexity encompassed in moral identity, but they require the assumption that individuals who engage in high levels of prosocial behavior have moral identities. However, it is uncertain to what extent such individuals have moral identities, because their prosocial actions could have stemmed from a variety of motivational sources (e.g., empathy, moral understanding, or selfish concerns) without moral principles being central to their identities.

In essence, the different methods used thus far for measuring moral identity all have their own strengths and limitations. While they have yielded useful information regarding relations between self and morality, none seem to assess moral identity in a way that is both direct and fully captures the moral identity construct. Therefore, it is critical that effort is made to improve the way in which moral identity is operationalized and measured. In particular, we urge researchers to more clearly outline their conceptualizations of moral identity and attend to designing valid measures that are congruent with these conceptions.

Second, more methodological diversity and sophistication is needed in research on moral identity. With few exceptions, moral identity studies have been cross-sectional, and all have been nonexperimental. In addition, most moral identity studies have involved small, non-representative samples, which limit the generalizability of their findings. Thus, longitudinal studies, and studies with larger, more diverse samples, can provide more information about causality, direction of influence, and the nature of relations between identity and morality among various populations. Even more, cross-cultural explorations



of moral identity are absent, but could prove invaluable in providing insight into the relative role of identity in morality.

Third, applied research on moral identity is needed. Work on moral identity may have promising implications for moral education, youth development programs, and various interventions. Traditionally such programs have not targeted promotion of positive or moral self-concept and identity, focusing instead on promoting one or two other components of morality, such as teaching moral values, or building empathic responding or moral reasoning abilities. There are exceptions, however, such as the service learning program explored by Youniss and Yates [1997], which promoted moral development, identity development, and aided youth in integrating moral commitment into their emerging sense of identity.

Fourth, researchers should seek to draw from diverse literatures in understanding moral identity. For example, Lapsley and Narvaez [2004b] based their model on social-cognitive and information-processing literatures, Reimer [2003] drew on cognitive neuroscience research, and Matsuba and Walker [2004] incorporated work in personality. The literature on self and identity is very rich in theory and empirical research but, as yet, moral identity scholars have not taken advantage of this literature. With the exception of Blasi [1983, 1984, 1993, 1995], most moral identity researchers have focused more on the 'moral' side of the concept to the neglect of the 'identity' side. One example of an area of research that could inform moral identity research is that on the multidimensional structure of self [Harter, 1999]. Moral identity models have emphasized the importance of morality to one's global self-concept and identity. However, in recent years the trend has been towards thinking of the self as multidimensional [Harter, 1999]. Thus, not only is there a global sense of self, but individuals also have selves specific to certain domains (e.g., peer relationships, school, jobs, and athletics). Moreover, Harter [1999] suggests that beginning in adolescence a domain specific self-concept may emerge for morality. Therefore, future research could explore the relevance of this work to research on moral identity.

As research on moral identity expands through improved methodology and refined measurement, the strengths and limitations of current thinking on moral identity will be further revealed. For example, further longitudinal studies may yield evidence of bidirectional relations between moral identity and moral action. Cross-cultural studies



may find that moral identity takes different forms in different cultures, or plays an important moral role in some cultures but not others. Studies comparing the relative influence on moral action of moral reasoning, moral emotion, and moral identity may find that the role of moral identity, comparatively, is less significant than anticipated. Continued examination of moral identity will likely result in the need to revise or dispense of existing models linking identity and morality.

## Conclusion

To help us more fully understand moral functioning, and moral motivation more specifically, Blasi [1983, 1984, 1993, 1995, 2001, 2004b, in press] and others [Arnold, 1993; Aquino & Reed, 2002; Bergman, 2002; Carlo, in press; Colby & Damon, 1992; Eisenberg, 1986; Gibbs, 2003; Hart, in press; Hoffman, 2000; Keller & Edelstein, 1993; Kohlberg & Candee, 1984; Krebs & Van Hesteren, 1994; Lapsley & Narvaez, 2004b; Monroe, 2001; Moshman, 2005; Nisan, 2004; Nucci, 2001; Nunner-Winkler, 1998; Power & Kmhelkov, 1998; Pratt et al., 2003; Reimer & Wade-Stein, 2004; Rest, 1983; Schwartz & Howard, 1982; Walker, 2004; Youniss & Yates, 1997] have advocated a role for the self in morality. However, little empirical research has examined identity as a source of motivation for moral action and commitment, leaving many conceptual notions of moral identity unexplored. Thus far, evidence suggests that individuals highly committed to moral causes seem to experience unity between their self and moral goals [Colby & Damon, 1992], and tend to more frequently use moral terms to describe their self than other individuals [Hart & Fegley, 1995; Reimer & Wade-Stein, 2004]. Further, the more individuals see moral virtues and values as important to their sense of self, the more likely they are to engage in moral behavior [Arnold, 1993; Aquino & Reed, 2002; Reed & Aquino, 2003; Pratt et al., 2003]. Hence, it seems connections do exist between the self and morality. However, questions of what constitutes moral identity, and how and why it is linked to moral behavior and commitment (including questions regarding causal directionality), remain unclear, and largely unexamined. Even more, some rightfully remain skeptical of the relative importance of identity in comparison to other components of morality [e.g., Nucci, 2004; Turiel, 2002]. Through conceptual refinement, and improved and expanded

research methodology, further understanding of the role and significance of identity in moral functioning can be gained.

It is hoped that this paper will stimulate dialogue regarding moral identity, provoke questions, and suggest possible avenues by which the field can move forward through conceptual and empirical investigation of this intriguing concept. It seems an exciting new frontier is opening in moral psychology, where more consideration will be given to the role of identity in moral functioning. Although it is still a fledgling research area, work on moral identity promises to move the field beyond predominant paradigms that have focused on certain dimensions of morality (e.g., moral reasoning or moral emotion), and will urge scholars to think about moral functioning in a more complex, integrative, and holistic manner. Finally, moral identity theory and research will help the field progress further in understanding what motivates and sustains moral behavior and commitment, an endeavor with important implications for moral psychology as well as society more broadly.

### *Acknowledgments*

The authors are especially grateful to Augusto Blasi for his efforts to help them better understand moral identity, and for his comments on an earlier draft of the manuscript. Also, the authors thank Carolyn Pope Edwards, David Moshman and Ross Thompson for their insightful comments and suggestions regarding earlier drafts of the manuscript.

### **References**

- Ajzen, I., & Fishbein, M. (1980). *Understanding attitudes and predicting social behavior*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Aquino, K., Ray, S., & Reed, A. (2003). Moral identity as a predictor of lying in negotiations. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Academy of Management, Seattle, WA.
- Aquino, K., & Reed, A., 2nd. (2002). The self-importance of moral identity. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 83, 1423-1440.
- Arnold, M.L. (1993). *The place of morality in the adolescent self*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Harvard University.
- Atkins, R., Hart, D., & Donnelly, T. M. (2004). Moral identity development and school attachment. In D.K. Lapsley & D. Narvaez (Eds.), *Moral development, self, and identity* (pp. 65-82). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

- Barriga, A. Q., Morrison, E. M., Liao, A. K., Gibbs, J.C. (2001). Moral cognition: Explaining the gender difference in antisocial behavior. *Merrill-Palmer Quarterly*, 47, 532-562.
- Bergman, R. (2002). Why be moral? A conceptual model from developmental psychology. *Human Development*, 45, 104-124.
- Blasi, A. (1980). Bridging moral cognition and moral action: A critical review of the literature. *Psychological Bulletin*, 88, 1-45.
- Blasi, A. (1983). Moral cognition and moral action: A theoretical perspective. *Developmental Review*, 3, 178-210.
- Blasi, A. (1984). Moral identity: Its role in moral functioning. In W. M. Kurtines & J. L. Gewirtz (Eds.), *Morality, moral behavior, and moral development* (pp. 129-139). New York, NY: Wiley.
- Blasi, A. (1988). Identity and the development of the self. In D.K. Lapsley & F.C. Power (Eds.), *Self, ego, and identity: Integrative approaches* (pp. 226-242). New York, NY: Springer.
- Blasi, A. (1993). The development of identity: Some implications for moral functioning. In G. G. Noam & T. E. Wren (Eds.), *The moral self* (pp. 99-122). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Blasi, A. (1995). Moral understanding and the moral personality: The process of moral integration. In W. M. Kurtines & J. L. Gewirtz (Eds.), *Moral development: An introduction* (pp. 229-253). Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon.
- Blasi, A. (1999). Emotions and moral motivation. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behavior*, 29, 1-19.
- Blasi, A. (2001). Moral motivation and society: Internalization and the development of the self. In G. Dux & F. Welk (Eds.), *Moral und Recht im Diskurs der Moderne. Zur Legitimation gesellschaftlicher Ordnung* (pp. 313-329). Opladen: Leske + Budrich.
- Blasi, A. (2004a). Neither personality nor cognition: An alternative approach to the nature of the self. In C. Lightfoot, C. Lalonde, & M. Chandler (Eds.), *Changing conceptions of psychological life* (pp. 3-25). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Blasi, A. (2004b). Moral functioning: Moral understanding and personality. In D.K. Lapsley & D. Narvaez (Eds.), *Moral development, self, and identity* (pp. 189-212). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Blasi, A. (in press). Moral character: A psychological approach. In D.K. Lapsley & F.C. Power (Eds.), *Character psychology and character education*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press.
- Blasi, A., & Glodis, K. (1995). The development of identity: A critical analysis from the perspective of the self as subject. *Developmental Review*, 15, 404-433.
- Blasi, A., & Milton, K. (1991). The development of the sense of self in adolescence. *Journal of Personality*, 59, 217-242.
- Blasi, A., & Oresick, R.J. (1987). Self-inconsistency and the development of the self. In P. Young-Eisendarth (Ed.), *The book of the self: Person, pretext, and process* (pp. 69-87). New York, NY: New York University Press.
- Bosma, A., & Kunnen, E.S. (Eds.) (2001). *Identity and emotion: Development through self-organization*. Paris: Cambridge University Press.
- Carlo, G. (in press). Care-based and altruistically-based morality. To appear in M. Killen & J. G. Smetana (Eds.), *Handbook of moral development*. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

- Colby, A., & Damon, W. (1992). *Some do care: Contemporary lives of moral commitment*. New York, NY: Free Press.
- Damasio, A. (1994). *Descartes' error: Emotion, reason, and the human brain*. New York, NY: Putnam.
- Damon, W. (1984). Self-understanding and moral development from childhood to adolescence. In W. M. Kurtines & J. L. Gewirtz (Eds.), *Morality, moral behavior, and moral development* (pp. 109–127). New York, NY: Wiley.
- Damon, W. (2000). Setting the stage for development of wisdom: Self-understanding and moral identity during adolescence. In W.S. Brown (Ed.), *Understanding wisdom: Sources, science, and society* (pp. 339–360). Philadelphia, PA: Templeton Foundation Press.
- Damon, W., & Hart, D. (1988). *Self-understanding in childhood and adolescence*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Davidson, P., & Youniss, J. (1991). Which comes first, morality or identity? In W. Kurtines & J. Gewirtz (Eds.), *Handbook of moral behavior and development: Vol. 2* (pp. 105–121). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Deci, E.L., & Ryan, R.M. (1991). A motivational approach to self: Integration in personality. In R. Dienstbier (Ed.), *Nebraska Symposium on Motivation: Perspectives on motivation*, Vol. 38 (pp. 237–288). Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press.
- Eisenberg, N. (1986). *Altruistic emotion, cognition, and behavior*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Eisenberg, N., & Miller, P.A. (1987). The relation of empathy to prosocial and related behaviors. *Psychological Bulletin*, 101, 91–119.
- Eisenberg, N., Shea, C.L., Carlo, G., & Knight, G. (1991). Empathy-related responding and cognition: A 'chicken and the egg' dilemma. In W. Kurtines & J. Gewirtz (Eds.), *Handbook of moral behavior and development: Vol. 2. Research* (pp. 63–88). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Erikson, E.H. (1964). *Insight and responsibility: Lectures on the ethical implications of psychoanalytic insight*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company.
- Gibbs, J.C. (2003). *Moral development and reality: Beyond the theories of Kohlberg and Hoffman*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Glodis, K.A., & Blasi, A. (1993). The sense of self and identity among adolescents and adults. *Journal of Adolescent Research*, 8, 356–380.
- Gollwitzer, P.M. (1993). Goal achievement: The role of intentions. *European Review of Social Psychology*, 4, 141–185.
- Grolnick, W.S., Deci, E.L., & Ryan, R.M. (1997). Internalization within the family: The self-determination theory perspective. In J. E. Grusec & L. Kuczynski (Eds.), *Parenting and children's internalization of values: A handbook of contemporary theory* (pp. 135–161). New York, NY: Wiley.
- Grotevant, H.D. (1998). Adolescent development in family contexts. In W. Damon (Series Ed.) & N. Eisenberg (Vol. Ed.), *Handbook of child psychology: Vol. 3. Social, emotional, and personality development* (5th ed., pp. 1097–1149). New York, NY: Wiley.
- Grusec, J., & Redler, E. (1980). Attribution, reinforcement, and altruism: A developmental analysis. *Developmental Psychology*, 16, 525–534.
- Haidt, J. (2001). The emotional dog and its rational tail: A social intuitionist approach to moral judgment. *Psychological Review*, 108, 814–834.

- Hart, D. (in press). The development of moral identity. In G. Carlo & C.P. Edwards (Eds.), *Nebraska Symposium on Motivation: Moral development through the lifespan: Theory, research, and application*, Vol. 51. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press.
- Hart, D., & Atkins, R. (2004). Religious participation and the development of moral identity in adolescence. In T.A. Thorkildsen & H.J. Walberg (Eds.), *Nurturing morality* (pp. 157-172). New York, NY: Kluwer/Plenum.
- Hart, D., Atkins, R., & Ford, D. (1998). Urban America as a context for the development of moral identity in adolescence. *Journal of Social Issues*, 54, 513-530.
- Hart, D., Atkins, R., & Ford, D. (1999). Family influences on the formation of moral identity in adolescence: Longitudinal analyses. *Journal of Moral Education*, 28, 375-386.
- Hart, D., & Fegley, S. (1995). Prosocial behavior and caring in adolescence: Relations to self-understanding and social judgment. *Child Development*, 66, 1346-1359.
- Harter, S. (1999). *The construction of the self: A developmental perspective*. New York, NY: The Guilford Press.
- Harter, S., & Monsour, A. (1992). Developmental analysis of conflict caused by opposing attributes in the adolescent self-portrait. *Developmental Psychology*, 28, 251-260.
- Hill, G., & Swanson, H.L. (1985). Construct validity and reliability of the ethical behavior rating scale. *Educational and Psychological Measurement*, 45, 258-292.
- Hoffman, M.L. (1970). Moral development. In P. Mussen (Ed.), *Handbook of child psychology* (pp. 261-361). New York, NY: John Wiley.
- Hoffman, M.L. (2000). *Empathy and moral development: Implications for caring and justice*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- James, W. (1961/1892). *Psychology: The briefer course*. New York, NY: Harper & Row.
- Keller, M., & Edelstein, W. (1993). The development of the moral self from childhood to adolescence. In G.G. Noam & T.E. Wren (Eds.), *The moral self* (pp. 310-336). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Kohlberg, L. (1969). Stage and sequence: The cognitive developmental approach to socialization. In D. A. Goslin (Ed.), *Handbook of socialization theory and research* (pp. 347-480). Chicago, IL: Rand McNally.
- Kohlberg, L., & Candee, D. (1984). The relationship of moral judgment to moral action. In W. M. Kurtines & J. L. Gewirtz (Eds.), *Morality, moral behavior, and moral development* (pp. 53-73). New York, NY: Wiley.
- Krebs, D. L., & Van Hesteren, F. (1994). The development of altruism: Toward an integrative model. *Developmental Review*, 14, 103-158.
- Lapsley, D. K., & Laskey, B. (2001). Prototypic moral character. *Identity*, 1, 345-363.
- Lapsley, D. K., & Narvaez, D. (Eds.) (2004a). *Moral development, self, and identity*. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Lapsley, D. K., & Narvaez, D. (2004b). A social-cognitive approach to the moral personality. In D. K. Lapsley & D. Narvaez (Eds.), *Moral development, self, and identity* (pp. 189-212). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Lapsley, D. K., & Narvaez, D. (in press). Moral psychology at the crossroads. In D. K. Lapsley & F. C. Power (Eds.), *Character psychology and character education*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press.

- Little, T. D., Snyder, C. R., & Wehmeyer, M. (in press). The agentic self: On the nature and origins of personal agency across the lifespan. In D. Mroczek & T. D. Little (Eds.), *The handbook of personality development*. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Matsuba, M. K., & Walker, L. J. (2004). Extraordinary moral commitment: Young adults involved in social organizations. *Journal of Personality*, 72, 413-436.
- Monroe, K. R. (2001). Morality and a sense of self: The importance of identity and categorization for moral action. *American Journal of Political Science*, 45, 491-507.
- Monroe, K. R. (2004). *The hand of compassion: Portraits of moral choice during the Holocaust*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Moshman, D. (2004). False moral identity: Self-serving denial in the maintenance of moral self-conceptions. In D. K. Lapsley & D. Narvaez (Eds.), *Moral development, self, and identity* (pp. 83-109). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Moshman, D. (2005). *Adolescent psychological development: Rationality, morality, and identity* (2nd ed.). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Narvaez, D., & Lapsley, D.K. (in press). The psychological foundations of moral expertise. In D. K. Lapsley & F. C. Power (Eds.), *Character psychology and character education*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press.
- Nisan, M. (2004). Judgment and choice in moral functioning. In D. K. Lapsley & D. Narvaez (Eds.), *Moral development, self, and identity* (pp. 133-160). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Nucci, L. (2001). *Education in the moral domain*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Nucci, L. (2004). Reflections on the moral self-construct. In D. K. Lapsley & D. Narvaez (Eds.), *Moral development, self, and identity* (pp. 111-132). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Nunner-Winkler, G. (1984). Two moralities: A critical discussion of an ethic of care and responsibility versus an ethic of rights and justice. In W. Kurtines & J. Gewirtz (Eds.), *Morality, moral behavior, and moral development* (pp. 348-361). New York, NY: Wiley.
- Nunner-Winkler, G. (1998). The development of moral understanding and moral motivation. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 27, 587-603.
- Oliner, S. P., & Oliner, P. M. (1988). *The altruistic personality: Rescuers of Jews in Nazi Europe*. New York, NY: Free Press.
- Power, C., & Kmhelkov, V. T. (1998). Character development and self-esteem: Psychological foundations and educational implications. *International Journal of Educational Psychology*, 27, 539-551.
- Pratt, M. W., Hunsberger, B., Pancer, S. M., & Alisat, S. (2003). A longitudinal analysis of personal value socialization: Correlates of moral self-ideal in adolescence. *Social Development*, 12, 563-585.
- Reed, A., 2nd, & Aquino, K. F. (2003). Moral identity and the expanding circle of moral regard towards out-groups. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 84, 1270-1286.
- Reimer, K. (2003). Committed to caring: Transformation in adolescent moral identity. *Applied Developmental Science*, 24, 129-137.
- Reimer, K., & Wade-Stein, D. (2004). Moral identity in adolescence: Self and other in semantic space. *Identity*, 4, 229-249.



- Rest, J. R. (1983). Morality. In P. Mussen (Series Ed.), J. Flavell & E. Markman (Vol. Eds.), *Handbook of child psychology: Vol. 3. Cognitive development* (4th ed., pp. 556–628). New York, NY: Wiley.
- Ryan, R. M., & Connell, J. P. (1989). Perceived locus of causality and internalization: Examining reasons for acting in two domains. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 57, 749–761.
- Schwartz, S. H., & Howard, J. A. (1982). Helping and cooperation: A self-based motivational model. In V. J. Derlaga & J. Grzelak (Eds.), *Cooperation and helping behavior: Theories and research*. New York, NY: Academic Press.
- Turiel, E. (2002). *The culture of morality*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Verplanken, B., & Holland, R. W. (2002). Motivated decision making: Effects of activation and self-centrality of values on choices and behavior. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 82, 434–447.
- Walker, L. J. (2004). Gus in the gap: Bridging the judgment-action gap in moral functioning. In D. K. Lapsley & D. Narvaez (Eds.), *Moral development, self, and identity* (pp. 1–20). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Walker, L. J., & Hennig, K. H. (1997). Moral development in the broader context of personality. In S. Hala (Ed.), *The development of social cognition* (pp. 297–327). Hove, UK: Psychology Press.
- Walker, L. J., & Hennig, K. H. (2004). Differing conceptions of moral exemplarity: Just, brave, and caring. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 86, 629–647.
- Walker, L. J., & Pitts, R. C. (1998). Naturalistic conceptions of moral maturity. *Developmental Psychology*, 34, 403–419.
- Youniss, J., & Yates, M. (1997). *Community service and social responsibility in youth*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.