

# The LSS Review



a catalyst for merging research, policy, and practice

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## Nurturing Morality

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Young people learn to define and respond to moral dilemmas from many sources, but they are likely to hear more about moral transgressions than about moral virtue in American life. Indeed, many parents believe that schools and the peer groups within them undermine their children's moral development, which partly explains why more than one million American children are homeschooled. Legislators and citizens echo this attitude when they encourage educators and other youth workers to reinforce virtuous conduct and when they write mission statements for state and local public schools that emphasize responsible citizenship and productive participation in civic life.

Nurturing morality in education is difficult. Educators, parents, and policymakers require a rich understanding of what morality is and how to nurture it. Program advocates are obligated to show that morality is appropriate in school and distinguish curricular goals from aspects of moral education that are best left to families,

churches, and other social institutions. Given the complexity of these issues, how can the expressed needs for nurturing morality be met?

To develop practical advice for educators and others dealing with moral development in young people and to construct policies for nurturing moral functioning, an invitational conference, "Nurturing Morality," was convened with nationally prominent researchers and practitioners September 4–6, 2002. The conference, cosponsored by the Johnson Foundation and the Laboratory for Student Success (LSS), was held at Wingspread, the Johnson Foundation's conference center in Racine, Wisconsin.

Papers commissioned expressly for this conference were pre-circulated to participants, and synopses of those papers are provided in this issue of *The LSS Review*. Drawing on their substantial research base and experience, the authors address the implications of long-debated definitions of morality, different facets of moral functioning, impediments to moral functioning, and the

means by which institutions can nurture young people's moral growth.

### Recommendations

Using the papers as a basis for discussion, conference participants developed recommendations for researchers, program developers, policymakers, and those who work with youths. The conferees were committed to a broad vision of education, observing that parents and school, civic, and political leaders have many opportunities for nurturing morality. This introduction summarizes their chief recommendations.

### RESEARCH AND PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

Efforts to nurture morality include programs to provide citizenship education, character education, drug prevention, social and emotional learning, service learning, and conflict resolution. Some programs have resulted in verifiable, improved behavioral and academic outcomes. Further investigation of such programs should more explic-  
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itly document the outcomes and the principles used to achieve them. Identifying the unifying central ideas should emphasize the best practices to incorporate in future programs.

To afford a more significant place in the curriculum for nurturing morality, scholars and program developers should develop and promulgate benchmarks of moral educational competencies for children, beginning with the early grades and extending to the completion of high school. Some older high-school students, for example, may benefit more than younger students from an educational experience outside of the traditional school building.

Other research is needed on how to extend programs from small, local efforts to large-scale, statewide, or even nationwide endeavors that serve many students facing diverse circumstances. Successful small-scale programs may demonstrate the importance of a charismatic leader with a clearly stated message, but how can programs be more widely extended?

An example of such a scaling-up effort is the Education Commission of the States' (ECS) *Citizenship Education Project Model for Engaging Leadership*. When implemented, this model brings together chief state school officers and district superintendents to share research on best practices in citizenship education. ECS then tracks policy discussion in states and establishes national partnerships that include deans and representatives from colleges of education to examine the field of character education.

#### SELECTING PROGRAMS

The papers identify a number of effective program principles. Policymakers, educators, and others should select programs with distinctive features. At minimum,

these programs should be:

- founded on evidence-based principles
- proven effective in evaluation
- suitable for the age or developmental level of the students to be served
- suitable for the ethnic, socioeconomic, and religious affiliations of the students to be served
- specific about institutional practices that must be changed to use the program
- specific about student behaviors expected to change as a result of the program
- specific about the means of determining whether the changes have been made

In addition, the program content and activities must fit the intentions of the policymakers, educators, and others involved in program selection.

#### MORALITY AND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

The federal No Child Left Behind Act demonstrates the determination of Congress to raise academic achievement. So far, 49 states have set forth standards of knowledge and skills and devised ways to measure them. Does morality fit into this agenda? Actually, nurturing morality appears to nurture achievement because morality implies virtuous conduct and respect for the self and the rights of others. Moral virtues are usually a prerequisite for constructive group activities, including acquiring academic knowledge and skills in classrooms. Thus, the connection deserves emphasis.

#### MORAL ENGAGEMENT OF EDUCATORS

Teachers and future teachers who are encouraged to consider a broad view of education that includes morality may be more likely to incorporate issues of social, emo-

tional, and moral growth in their personal and professional lives. Without personal and professional reflection on the dangers of moral disengagement, they may not be able to lead their students to avoid such dangers. Preservice and inservice professional development programs can show educators how morally constructive activities can be integrated with academic lessons during the school day.

#### COMMUNITY RESPONSIBILITIES

The number of hours in the school day is limited, and nurturing morality need not be confined to the classroom. Ample opportunities exist in family contexts, during extracurricular activities, and within community-based programs to encourage moral sensibility among children and youths. The after-school hours are as important as those during the school day. Some conferees believed that schools should be organized to ensure that all children and adolescents have in their lives a caring adult who knows them well, a person in whom they could confide or ask for help. Others noted the importance of ensuring that youths learn to interact with adults outside family and school contexts. Parents and teachers might serve as caring adults, but with appropriate organization, other adults in contact with children and adolescents may further enrich the life experiences of young people.

To ensure that all children and adolescents have adequate support within their communities, families might work effectively with the staff members of schools, churches, and community-based organizations. Regional educational laboratories and other organizations could post on their websites lists of exemplary interinstitutional collaborations; knowledge of model programs might prove to be inspira-

tional and informative. Disseminating procedural models for developing collaborative groups, including societal institutions that affect the welfare of young people, can ensure that community leaders are not working at cross purposes.

#### DEBATE AND ADVOCACY

In any free society, tensions exist between various moral views. Making the differences explicit and discussing them in depth can be useful for identifying common ground and moving forward. In a pluralistic society, there should be lively debate about what is being promoted; from such debate, shared goals can be identified. Individuals across the political spectrum, for example, may agree that empathy and ethics are important ends of education. Other consensual ends may be personal responsibility, tolerance, self-awareness, respect for diversity, and wise and considerate decision making.

Framing moral issues in terms of how people's lives and commu-

nities may be improved can provide an incentive for nurturing morality. Some may be motivated by altruistic concerns about children and youths. Others who see morality as in their self-interest may come to feel a sense of urgency about accepting responsibility for nurturing morality.

To gain greater support and cooperation from people of such varying views, those who want to nurture morality may make such reasoning better known. Agents of the mass media, for example, might be challenged to raise their awareness of how much of the news about children and youths is negative and how much news about schools too often focuses only on test scores. Could there not be more news about the exemplary conduct of children and youths?

Those who want to nurture morality might well raise moral concerns among parents as well as teachers, administrators, and other professionals in their communities. Advocates may help parents and edu-

cators see that schools have a responsibility not only for cognitive goals but also for the social, emotional, civic, ethical, and moral education of students.

Depending on the circumstances, this advocacy might be incremental as programs and activities are slowly added to the curriculum. In other cases, ambitious schoolwide or districtwide programs might be advanced. Superintendents, for example, might support at least one person at the district level to initiate and coordinate programs to nurture morality.

Advocates may be able to influence national certification groups and teachers' unions to consider the nurturing of morality as intrinsic to the broad view of education. It may also be possible to seize opportunities for influencing legislators.

Together, these forms of moral agency can stimulate the idea that nurturing morality should be a central responsibility of all those who serve children and youths. ☘

## What Does Moral Functioning Entail?

*Lawrence J. Walker, University of British Columbia*

Character formation and moral development have recently been the focus of renewed interest and vigorous debate. This situation has been provoked by the clash of moral values apparent in competing worldviews; recurrent observations regarding the claimed deterioration in moral standards and behavior; and concerns about the adequacy of moral socialization in families, schools, peer groups, and the media. This paper establishes the scope of the moral domain in an attempt to keep us mindful of its breadth and complexity and to help us nurture moral maturity in children and adolescents.

### Scope of the Moral Domain

A current conceptual skew, which follows a tradition of rationalist philosophies of the Enlightenment, yields an inadequate depiction of moral functioning and thus provides ineffectual means for fostering moral maturity. Most contemporary moral psychology theories have focused on moral reasoning as applied to interpersonal relationships, with a dualistic understanding of human nature—reason versus passion, with passions regarded as corrupting biases. These theories have ignored the intrapsychic aspects of moral personality that reflect people's

basic values, lifestyles, and characters. This kind of programmatic research within a specific philosophical tradition can result in a restriction of perspective; therefore, a more balanced and comprehensive perspective on morality is necessary. Moral psychology and education should be more closely aligned with how people actually understand and experience morality than with the tight constraints of philosophical conceptualizations.

*Morality* can be defined as a fundamental and pervasive aspect of human functioning, with both

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interpersonal and intrapsychic components; it refers to voluntary actions that may have social and interpersonal implications and that are governed by internal psychological mechanisms. There are several things to note about this working definition. First, the interpersonal aspects of moral functioning have been well incorporated into contemporary moral psychology and education, but dominant theories in moral psychology have largely ignored issues such as the development of values and the acquisition of moral character.

Second, moral functioning involves the dynamic interplay of thought, emotion, and behavior; however, most major theoretical models in moral psychology have obfuscated the interactive and interdependent nature of thought, emotion, and behavior in moral functioning.

Finally, although it has been argued that social understandings can be separated into moral, social-conventional, and personal-prudential domains, morality should be considered as much more pervasive in daily life.

### **Conceptions and Experiences of Morality**

To reveal the aspects of psychological development that contribute to extraordinary moral action, a recent series of empirical studies explores people's conceptions and experiences of morality. The research examines conceptions of moral functioning and the psychological functioning of moral exemplars. People's notions about morality are important to study because they are influential in everyday life and can serve as needed complements to philosophically derived theories.

One of these studies, which included extensive open-ended interviews regarding participants'

conceptions of morality and their handling of moral problems, revealed that people frequently deal with intrapsychic moral issues and relational issues that are not well tapped by dominant models and measures of moral development. Many people reported aspects of moral functioning to which the models have paid minimal attention, including a reliance on intuition; a concern with practical considerations and outcomes; and a dependence on faith, religion, and spirituality. Additionally, different aspects of morality may characterize individuals' identities and may have differing degrees of centrality in their lives.

Another research project examining conceptions of moral excellence identified two dimensions—the self–other and the external–internal dimensions—underlying conceptions of moral functioning. One end of the self–other dimension includes traits that emphasize personal agency and commitment, and the other end includes traits that focus on care for others. This dimension incorporates some of the dynamics of dominance and nurturance as fundamental in the understanding of personality and behavior. The range of these moral virtues means that they are sometimes in tension. Similarly, the external–internal dimension reflects the occasional tension between external moral standards and personal conscience.

This project also examined the relationships among understanding of the moral, religious, and spiritual domains. Analyses indicated that these domains are indeed related in people's understandings. However, whereas moral virtues were found to be somewhat independent of religious and spiritual ones, notions of religion and spirituality were found to be somewhat embedded in notions of morality.

One question resulting from this research is whether a single prototype for moral maturity exists. The different moral virtues may represent an amalgamation of traits that would be impossible—indeed, incoherent—for any one person to embody. We currently have little understanding of how these aspects of moral character interact in psychological functioning.

Another research project examined the similarities and differences between just, brave, and caring exemplars. Analyses revealed dissimilar personality profiles for the three types, but some traits were found to be common to all three. These common traits included honesty, dependability, self-control, positive communal emotionality, sociability, personal agency, positivity, emotional stability, and openness. These common denominators are clearly foundational for moral functioning and warrant further study.

Other analyses identified virtues that are frequently in tension in these exemplars. Despite evidence that people identify a set of core virtues across disparate types of moral exemplarity, these exemplars had different personality traits, each typifying a distinct moral personality. However, not all moral traits are necessarily compatible, and some may be antithetical. Additionally, most virtues have maladaptive or morally questionable aspects to their expression in some circumstances or when taken to excess.

The major limitation to the study of conceptions of moral functioning is that it describes people's understandings rather than the actual psychological functioning of real moral exemplars. A recent analysis of people who evidenced extraordinary commitment to moral ideals and causes reveals some valuable insights, but more systematic data are required. Thus, another

part of the current research program focuses on comprehensive analyses of the psychological functioning of moral exemplars. Admittedly, the identification of actual exemplars is sometimes controversial.

One study compared the psychological functioning of young adult exemplars (i.e., social service agency volunteers) with a matched comparison group. The moral exemplars had higher agreeableness and were more mature in their identities, had more mature faith development, and used more advanced moral reasoning. This research indicates several psychological processes that contribute to exceptional moral character and action. However, moral maturity can be exemplified in different ways, and it is important to determine the similarities and differences among different moral exemplars.

Another project is examining the character and personality of two types of moral exemplars—exceptionally brave versus caring people—to develop a comprehensive understanding of moral functioning that integrates cognition, personality, and action.

### Applications and Conclusions

This paper is meant to foster a more holistic and balanced account of what moral functioning entails and thereby prompt more effective means for nurturing children's moral and character development. Some recommendations are the following:

- Models of moral functioning and approaches to moral education must address both the interpersonal and intrapsychic aspects of the domain. It is important for children to learn not only how to regulate their relationships with others and to resolve conflicts but also how to acquire the fundamental values

and goals that should characterize their identities and ways of living.

- Models and methods of moral education should address the multifaceted complexity of moral functioning and include meaningful attention to moral reasoning, moral emotions, and moral action.
- Models of moral functioning and approaches to character education must take account of the finding that, for many people, the moral and religious domains are intertwined in significant ways.
- Children must be sensitized to the breadth of the moral domain and the moral implications of their values, decisions, and actions. Making children more aware of the moral domain helps foster the development of a moral identity so that moral concerns become relevant to most activities in life. It is important that children recognize the pervasive nature of morality and do not compartmentalize it as a circumscribed and largely irrelevant facet of life.
- Intervention efforts should address moral issues that are developmentally appropriate and that children frequently encounter and find difficult and troubling.
- Moral education should entail a critical discussion of moral virtues, particularly ones that form the core of the moral domain. Children need to struggle with underlying tensions in moral functioning, discover how to exemplify these traits, and come to appreciate the maladaptive aspects of many virtues.
- Moral heroes are worthy of some emulation, and children should explore the lives of well-known, visible exemplars as

well as local, personal ones. However, exemplars' lives should be examined fully. Additionally, children's moral involvement in meaningful moral action should be encouraged and facilitated.

- Children should learn to recognize the diversity in types of moral excellence and to find personal moral exemplars with whom they can identify. A single model of moral maturity should not necessarily be promulgated; rather, children should be encouraged to foster different areas of moral excellence. ☞

## *The LSS REVIEW*

Danielle Shaw  
*Editor*

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# The Role of Perceived Responsibility in Nurturing Morality

Sandra Graham, University of California, Los Angeles

Most definitions of morality emphasize social behavior. This paper shows that aggression toward others and poor school achievement are part of the same moral system and can be understood within a framework of perceived responsibility. Children who aggress against others do so partly because they make inaccurate inferences about whether other people are responsible for negative events, and children who perform poorly in school do so partly because they do not take personal responsibility for their own achievement. Therefore, one approach to nurturing morality in the social and academic domains is to focus on increasing social skills related to accurately inferring responsibility in others and building academic skills related to self-responsibility for learning.

## Attributional Analysis of Perceived Responsibility

Attribution theory includes causal attributions, which are answers to “why” questions. The main perceived causes of achievement, for example, are ability, effort, task difficulty or ease, luck, mood, and help or hindrance from others.

Because attributions vary greatly across domains and between individuals, attribution theorists have examined the underlying causes in addition to specific causes. Three underlying causes are *locus*, or whether a cause is internal or external; *stability*, or whether a cause is constant or varies over time; and *controllability*, or whether a cause is subject to volitional influence. Each cause has both psychological and behavioral consequences: whereas controllability connotes responsibility and intentionality, uncontrollability implies non-responsibility and unintended behav-

ior. When others are perceived as being responsible for negative events, attribution elicits anger and the desire to neglect, inflict harm, or punish.

## ATTRIBUTIONAL BIASES

People tend to take credit for their success and blame failure on external causes, a phenomenon known as *hedonic bias*. They also tend to make trait attributions about others and situational attributions about themselves, which is called *actor-observer bias*. These attributional biases become dysfunctional when they lead to poor relationships, ineffective problem solving, or undue hostility toward others.

## HOSTILE ATTRIBUTIONAL BIAS

Aggressive youths display a *hostile attributional bias* when they overattribute negative intent to others, particularly when provocation is ambiguous. Hostile attributional bias can lead to anger and the desire to retaliate. Even socially competent children with this kind of bias can feel justified in endorsing aggressive behavior.

This bias is correlated with conduct disorder, externalizing behavior, and peer rejection, and it interferes with the processing of social information, anger management, and effective problem solving. Attribution retraining, in which aggressive boys learn to infer nonhostile intent in ambiguous situations, has short-term effects in reducing anger intensity and antisocial behavior. Hostile attributional biases emerge early in aggressive children’s lives, are partly a product of socialization experiences, and take on a traitlike quality as they become the preferred

mode for handling ambiguous provocation.

Childhood aggression is a risk factor for juvenile delinquency, and hostile attributional bias is seen in adolescent offenders. Hostile biases are correlated with violent crimes but not with property crimes, and they are displayed more by reactively aggressive offenders than by proactively aggressive offenders. Offenders who report high family conflict, are hypervigilant, and report more neighborhood disorder and violence also display more extreme hostile biases.

Attributional bias is part of a general syndrome of social cognitive deficits, including inattention to relevant cues, poor recall of cues, weak perspective taking, impulsive decision making, and a limited ability to generate effective solutions. This syndrome can put youths at greater risk for immoral behavior. Altering biased attributions might be a reasonable starting point for nurturing morality because social cognitions are far more amenable to change than are family and neighborhood contexts.

## ACHIEVEMENT STRIVINGS AND SELF-RESPONSIBILITY

Ascribing responsibility for achievement to oneself is more likely to result in high expectations, positive affect, praise from others, and sustained effort. Motivation is enhanced when students select tasks of intermediate difficulty. When risk taking and level of aspiration increase after success and decrease after failure, an individual is altering his or her expectations to be compatible with likely outcomes. This behavior also fosters self-responsibility because failure at difficult tasks and success at easy tasks can be

attributed to external factors. Additionally, setting short-term goals increases effort and self-responsibility by providing immediate incentives. Long-term goals, in contrast, are often too far removed in time to effectively mobilize effort.

Students who are task focused rather than ego focused are more likely to take intermediate risks and set short-term goals. Mastery goals can also be contrasted with performance goals. Task focus and a mastery orientation have positive effects on students' self-perceptions and willingness to engage in achievement activities. Furthermore, task focus promotes self-responsibility because success and failure are determined through comparison with self-standards rather than normative standards and outcomes are ascribed more to effort than to external factors. Students are more likely to persist if they attribute failure to controllable causes because doing so implies that the same outcome need not reoccur.

#### SELF-RESPONSIBILITY AND ACHIEVEMENT EFFORT IN MINORITY YOUTHS

Many youths, particularly ethnic minority youths with histories of school failure, have difficulty engaging in morally appropriate achievement behavior because they are reluctant to take responsibility for their learning. Economic and social disadvantages have led many African Americans to believe that their efforts in school will have relatively little economic and social payoff, and they may perceive acceptance of mainstream values about hard work and success as threatening to social identity. African American adolescents may be particularly oppositional and show relative indifference or even disdain toward achievement behaviors.

One study showed that ethnic minority girls in elementary and middle school overwhelmingly wanted to be

similar to classmates who do well in school and are perceived to try very hard. However, African American and Latino middle-school boys valued low-achieving boys who are perceived as not trying hard. Ethnic minority adolescents who perceive barriers to success based on race and social class may find it difficult to sustain effort and assume self-responsibility for achievement.

#### Best Foot Forward

The Best Foot Forward intervention is designed for at-risk African American elementary-school boys who attend school in an economically depressed community. These boys are identified by their peers and teachers as aggressive and by their teachers as having serious motivational problems. The intervention consists of an after-school curriculum with two separate but interrelated components, social skills and academic motivation training.

#### SOCIAL SKILLS TRAINING

The social skills component addresses attributional bias. Participants read others' nonverbal clues to learn to distinguish accidental from hostile acts and to accurately infer others' intentions. Account giving is also explored. *Accounts* are explanations or reasons for social transgressions. Effective account giving helps people manage the impressions that others have of them. By shifting causal responsibility to others, accounts can reduce others' anger and hostility. Acknowledging responsibility and apologizing for misdeeds are more likely to evoke forgiveness than are denying or minimizing wrongdoing.

Aggressive boys show less understanding of consequences and may be less willing to forgive others. The social skills training intervention phase teaches participants to understand different kinds of accounts and what they imply about personal re-

sponsibility in order to learn strategic account giving. The boys also learn how to honor others' accounts by displaying greater forgiveness when others apologize.

#### ACADEMIC MOTIVATION TRAINING

The academic motivation component includes risk taking, goal setting, task focus, and attribution retraining. By learning about self-responsibility in these areas and focusing on the interpersonal consequences of taking responsibility for achievement, aggressive boys can learn a set of motivational skills that are generalizable across a variety of achievement contexts.

#### OUTCOME MEASURES AND RESULTS

The intervention assessed changes in boys' reactions to ambiguous peer provocation and their understanding of accounts; teacher ratings of children's social behavior before and after the intervention; changes in students' goal setting and attributions for achievement failure; and students' grades and teacher comments about academic progress. Intervention and control group boys participated in a task that both simulated ambiguous peer provocation and measured intermediate risk-taking behaviors.

The boys in the intervention group were rated by their teachers as showing more cooperation and persistence than control group boys and were judged as having improved more socially and academically. A follow-up study should be conducted to determine whether the intervention had lasting effects, which is important given our interests in the effect of the intervention on academic performance and attitudes about school.

#### Implications for Intervention Design

The Best Foot Forward intervention approach can serve as a spring-  
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board for discussion about how school-based programs for nurturing morality can better conform to the guidelines of good intervention science. Several principles for the effective design and implementation of school-based interventions follow. First, interventions should be theory guided. Second, they should have multiple components and multiple informants. Third, interventions should build in a longitudinal component so that cumulative effects across critical

periods of transition can be examined. Fourth, interventions need boosters, especially during developmental transitions. Fifth, interventions should be developmentally and culturally sensitive.

It is sometimes difficult to reconcile the costs of intervention research in relation to perceived benefits. In the case of Best Foot Forward, if we think about reducing the risk that intervention boys will become delinquent as adolescents, then

projected savings in terms of the costs of incarcerating even one juvenile (about \$35,000 a year) are substantial. Add to this the savings in terms of *human capital*—increased opportunity among at-risk youth for education, personal growth, responsible citizenship, and moral virtue—and then the potential benefits to society of effective school-based interventions are enormous. The time seems ripe for serious attempts to nurture morality in schools. ☘

## Selective Exercise of Moral Agency

*Albert Bandura, Stanford University*

An understanding of morality must explain not only how people come to behave morally but also how they selectively disengage moral self-sanctions in everyday situations. In the development of a moral self, individuals adopt standards that serve as guides and deterrents for conduct. Moral agency is exercised through the constraint of negative self-sanctions for conduct that violates one's moral standards and the support of positive self-sanctions for conduct faithful to personal moral standards.

### Dual Nature of Moral Agency

The exercise of moral agency has an *inhibitive* form that keeps people from behaving inhumanely and a *proactive* form that helps them behave humanely. Individuals can shift from being moral disengagers to moral engagers through humanization, which can rouse empathy and a sense of social obligation. This shift enlists self-evaluative reactions that motivate humane actions while sacrificing one's self-interest or safety. In studies of inhibitive morality, adults are studied for their power to refrain from behaving injuriously under conditions conducive to inhumane conduct, and children are

studied for their power to resist instigation to transgressive conduct. But the proactive form of morality receives relatively little attention.

### Mechanisms of Moral Disengagement

Moral standards are not unceasing internal regulators of conduct, and self-regulatory mechanisms do not operate unless they are activated. Many psychosocial maneuvers enable moral self-sanctions to become disengaged from inhumane conduct, and selective activation and disengagement of self-sanctions permit different types of conduct by persons with the same moral standards. Large-scale inhumanities are typically perpetrated by compassionate people; people can even be ruthless and humane simultaneously toward different individuals.

*Moral justification* sanctifies pernicious means through worthy ends so that people can act on a moral imperative and preserve a favorable view of themselves while inflicting harm. Moral justification is often used in military pursuits in which the morality of killing is redefined as heroic. Religion and nationalism have also been used to justify violence.

*Euphemistic language* can make harmful conduct socially respectable and personally acceptable. Euphemizing may include using sanitized language (in which even killing someone loses its repugnancy), the agentless passive voice (which creates the appearance that reprehensible acts are the work of nameless forces rather than people), and the misuse of the specialized jargon of legitimate enterprises.

Behavior is colored by what it is compared against; through *advantageous comparison*, reprehensible acts can be made righteous. The more flagrant the contrasting inhumanities, the more likely it is that destructive conduct will appear benevolent. Expedient historical comparison also serves self-exonerating purposes. Immoral means can be justified if the ends are presented as honorable; however, because the future is uncertain and human judgment is biased, predictions of long-term results are often suspect.

In *displaced responsibility*, people view their actions as stemming from the dictates of authorities rather than being personally responsible. People may claim they are "simply carrying out orders."

When behaving immorally, authorities may surreptitiously sanction protective systems and remain intentionally uninformed, leaving themselves blameless. When harmful practices are publicized, they are dismissed as isolated misunderstandings, with blame shifted to misguided or overzealous subordinates. The “best” subordinates honor their obligations to authorities but do not feel responsible for the harm they cause.

Moral control is also weakened through *diffusion of responsibility*. Through a division of labor, subdivided tasks may seem harmless. Group decision making also enables otherwise considerate people to behave inhumanely. When everyone is responsible, no one really feels responsible. Collective action, which provides anonymity, weakens moral control. Harm done by a group can be attributed to the behavior of others, making individuals feel blameless.

Moral control may also be weakened through *disregard* or *distortion of consequences*. People avoid facing the harm they cause or they minimize it. If minimization does not work, they may discredit the evidence of harm.

Harming others is easier when destructive actions are remote from their effects. Death technologies have become highly lethal and depersonalized, with mass destruction delivered remotely via computers. Most social systems involve hierarchical chains of command with superiors formulating plans and intermediaries transmitting them to functionaries who carry them out. The further removed individuals are from destructive results, the weaker the restraining power.

*Attribution of blame*, or blaming adversaries or circumstances, also serves self-exonerating purposes. Also, justified abuse can

have more devastating consequences than acknowledged cruelty. When victims are convincingly blamed, they may believe the degrading characterizations of themselves, and observers may derogate the victims, thus leading to justification for further maltreatment.

Perceiving others as human arouses empathy, making it difficult to mistreat them. However, self-censure for cruelty can be disengaged or blunted through *dehumanization*. People who are given punitive power treat dehumanized individuals more ruthlessly. Combining diffused responsibility with dehumanization greatly escalates the level of punitiveness.

Bureaucratization, automation, urbanization, and high mobility are conducive to impersonalization and dehumanization, as are social and political practices that divide people into ingroup and outgroup members. Also, because the Internet promotes anonymity and is readily accessible, connected worldwide for far-reaching and remote consequences, and difficult to control, it lends itself to dehumanization. Concealment and depersonalization may remove personal and social sanctions for pernicious conduct.

### **Power of Humanization**

Research emphasizes how easy it is to bring out the worst in people through dehumanization and other self-exonerating means. However, most people refuse to behave cruelly even with strong authoritarian commands toward humanized others when they have to inflict pain directly. Research’s emphasis on obedient aggression is understandable considering the prevalence of inhumanity; however, the power of humanization to counteract cruelty is also important because the affirmation of common humanity can bring out the best in people.

## **Developmental Changes in Moral Disengagement**

Children quickly learn how to disengage self-censure from trans-  
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The Laboratory for Student Success (LSS) is one of 10 Regional Educational Laboratories (RELs) funded by the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) of the U.S. Department of Education to revitalize and reform educational practices in the service of student success. The overarching goal of the LSS is to strengthen the capacity of the mid-Atlantic region, which includes Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Washington, DC, to enact and sustain lasting systemic educational reform through collaborative programs of applied research and development and services to the field. The U.S. Department of Education designated LSS as the lead laboratory in the specialty area of educational leadership.

The primary mission of LSS is to bring about lasting improvements in the learning of the mid-Atlantic region’s increasingly diverse student population. The ultimate goal of LSS is to establish a system of research, development and dissemination that connects schools, parents, community agencies, professional groups, and higher education institutions; gradually expands improvement efforts in the region to transform low-performing schools into high-performing learning communities; and is part of a national system of information exchange.

gressive conduct, and boys soon become more facile moral disengagers than girls. Children enlist the disengagement mechanisms in varying degrees, most often using moral justification; displacement of responsibility; devaluing victims; and, less frequently, euphemistic labeling and advantageous comparison.

Moral development has typically been related to abstract moral principles; however, although almost everyone is virtuous in the abstract, differences lie in the ease of moral disengagement under real-life conditions. Moral disengagement may lead to violent and dissocial behavior, including having low guilt over injurious conduct, dwelling on vengeful rumination, and quickly resorting to aggression and transgression.

### **Promotion of Humaneness Through Moral Engagement**

When exercising proactive morality, people act in the name of humane principles when social circumstances dictate expedient, transgressive, and detrimental conduct. They disavow using worthy social ends to justify destructive means, sacrifice their well-being rather than accede to unjust practices, take personal responsibility for consequences, remain sensitive to others' suffering, and do not dehumanize others.

Research shows that whereas parents of aggressive sons rely on fear-based control, parents of prosocial sons cultivate empathy-based control; the latter type of control fosters development of empathic perspective taking and prosocial behavior, which promotes helpfulness, sharing, consoling, and supportiveness and curbs injurious conduct. Morality can be nurtured by restoring humaneness to conduct so that people live in accordance with their moral standards. Peer model-

ing of prosocial solutions and unmasking self-exonerative maneuvers have been used to foster moral reengagement. Whereas moral engagement can reduce violence, boosting self-exonerative vindications can lead to an endorsement of violence.

### **Interplay of Personal and Social Influences**

The self-regulation of morality is not entirely personal; rather, morality is socially grounded. Social cognitive theorists propose that moral actions stem from an interplay of cognitive, affective, and social influences. After self-regulatory capabilities are developed, behavior usually produces self-evaluative reactions and external outcomes that may operate as complementary or opposing influences.

Self-regulation of moral conduct creates the fewest strains when socially rewardable conduct is a source of satisfaction and pride and socially punishable conduct brings self-censure. But when people do not have countervailing internal standards, they may behave in response to situational pressures or expediency.

People commonly experience conflicts when they are rewarded for behavior they devalue. If the allure of rewards outweighs self-censure, the result can be cheerless compliance. However, people are skilled at reconciling disparities between personal standards and conduct by selectively disengaging their moral standards. Conflicts also arise when individuals are punished for activities they highly value. The relative strength of self-approval and external censure determines whether courses of action are pursued or abandoned. However, some individuals' sense of self-worth is so invested in certain convictions that they submit to maltreatment

rather than accede to what they regard as unjust or immoral.

### **Collective Moral Disengagement**

Selective moral disengagement operates at a social systems level, not just individually. The tobacco, gun, and television industries, for example, require collective moral disengagement. International weapons merchants also use moral disengagement. Terrorism requires a worldwide network of reputable, high-level members of society who supply the means of terrorism by fractionation of the operations and displacement and diffusion of responsibility.

Given the many devices for disengaging moral self-sanctions, societies cannot rely solely on individuals. In addition to personal ethics, humaneness requires social systems with safeguards that uphold compassion and curb cruelty. Whether inhumane practices are executed institutionally, organizationally, or individually, it should be made difficult for people to remove humanity from their actions. ❀

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# Care Gone Awry

## The Role of Attachment and Reflective Functioning

Karl H. Hennig, University of Guelph

In the microcosm of personal relationships—just as in the macrocosm of political and social ideals—seemingly well-intentioned moral principles can go awry when “moral” standards are excessively punitive, are vague and perfectionistic, or are rigidly enjoined irrespective of contexts and persons. For example, caring (which includes empathy, sympathy, and respect) is a moral ideal shared by many contemporary cultures; however, expressions of caring can be perceived by would-be recipients as threatening, constraining, or burdensome when they fail to meet the needs of the situation. The authentic role of care, nevertheless, is integral to a contextually and psychologically sensitive model of character development, and an individual’s perception of and reaction to the caring–receiving situation is often dependent on early experiences in the parent–infant attachment bond.

### Giving and Receiving Help

A context-sensitive definition of morality directs us away from a simple definition of what makes moral actions praiseworthy. Accurately interpreting a specific situation and determining the right thing to do may be difficult, requiring some anticipation of the recipient’s response. The idea of reflective functioning can help nurture the development of a rich understanding of persons within specific situations. *Reflective functioning* is a developmentally acquired capacity that permits individuals to respond not only to others’ outward behavior but also to their understanding of others’ beliefs, feelings, hopes, wishes, and

plans. Reflective functioning culminates in practical wisdom and is regarded as an integral component of moral identity.

Insufficient reflective functioning accompanies situations in which donors of care and help *fail* to grasp the complexities of the situation or do not realize what is at stake for recipients. Although recipients may be genuinely appreciative and positively evaluate donors, recipients may also perceive offers of help as punitive communications of mistrust and criticism and thus refuse assistance. Four theories—equity, reactance, attribution, and threat to self-esteem—demonstrate how care can be perceived by recipients as either predominantly threatening or supportive.

*Equity theories* assume that people aspire to maintain equitable or fair relationships with one another and that inequality gives rise to discomfort, motivating individuals to fix the imbalance. These efforts to fix imbalances may involve attempts at reciprocity or changes in the recipient’s perception of the donor.

*Reactance theory* highlights the motivational importance of personal freedom and the perception of threat associated with anything that would constrain that freedom. When restrictions of freedom are perceived as unreasonable, attention becomes focused on removing the restriction.

*Attribution theories* focus on the attributions or meanings recipients make of donors’ intentions, themselves, and the present situation. Offers of aid that are perceived as well intentioned are better received than are those that are

accompanied by ulterior motives. Additionally, offers of assistance are perceived as less of a threat to self-competence when the difficulty of the task is emphasized.

Lastly, although people may feel some burden of reciprocity or a constraint on personal freedom when aid is rendered, the *threat to self-esteem model* states that self-related concerns are central in determining recipients’ responses. Offers of help contain a mixture of self-threatening and supportive elements, and accepting the submissive or inferior role conflicts with people’s drive for autonomy.

### Caregiving–Attachment Complementarity

Within the parent–infant bond, internal models of caring and receiving care first form, likely directing future strategies for providing care to others. An ethic of care can be viewed as a complementary relationship between support seeking and caregiving, a dynamic that is complicated by its dependence on our earliest experiences of care within the parent–infant bond. An offer of help may make a recipient feel like a child. Conversely, an individual may subtly evoke care from others and simultaneously resent the assistance. Internal models of these relationships are largely outside of an individual’s awareness.

### Attachment Theory

Attachment theory can be seen as a guiding paradigm of moral identity. Infants’ signaling behaviors are ideally complemented by the sensitive and comforting responses

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of parents, jointly forming the attachment relationship. Attachment *security* is associated with caregivers who respond promptly, consistently, and appropriately to infants' distress signals. But difficulty with consistently obtaining comfort from caregivers can lead to protest behaviors, anxiety, anger, and sometimes sadness, which may elicit intermittent forms of care. In cases of insecurity within the attachment relationship, the child may become inflexible in relationships and may become anxiously attached or avoidant. These attachment patterns are relatively stable, and the stability extends across generations.

*Avoidant* infants often develop problems with hostility and demonstrate little empathy. Avoidant children have detached themselves from others and from their own emotions and self-understanding. Avoidant adults have difficulty in recalling attachment-relevant information, discount the relevance of early experiences, and may recall experiences as negative or rejecting; however, they may idealize their parents.

*Anxious* infants often become impulsive and dependent later in life and may become easily overwhelmed by seeing others distressed. Anxious adults typically have access to childhood memories but have difficulty organizing them into coherent narratives, may appear confused about negative aspects of their experiences with their parents, and continue to make great efforts to gain parental acceptance.

*Secure* infants are free to access the full range of their affective and behavioral responses. Secure adults value attachments and relationships, can be objective in their recollections of past events, and are capable of freely exploring the negative and positive aspects of experiences. Secure adults possess a

coherent narrative understanding of themselves and demonstrate greater nuances in their understanding of other people, including their own children. Sensitive parents contribute to their children's self-understanding and cognitive development.

### **The Two Faces of "Care Gone Awry"**

Individuals' dominant styles of relating become incorporated into their ideal selves, and they tend to idealize rigid modes of interpersonal relating. In schematic form, people either move away, toward, or against others. Later social adjustments and gender roles can exacerbate these problems by associating female moral goodness with caring and self-sacrifice and male moral goodness with independence. Intervention is difficult because these constricted ways of relating are deeply integrated into how people prefer to view themselves.

Shaming and neglectful environments may teach children the adaptive advantage of turning off their caring emotions. Conversely, individuals who seem to express care may actually be expressing overly anxious forms of attachment; their "caring" is neither accurate nor authentic because it fails to meet situational needs.

Existing research programs share the belief that *intrusiveness in caring* and *excessive other-focus* are problematic for both benefactors and recipients, leading to anxious concern or self-sacrificial care. *Anxious concern* is associated with timidity, self-doubt, fear of negative evaluation, and avoidance of social situations that include challenge and authority. These individuals can accept themselves only when others first accept them. *Self-sacrificial care* is associated with the avoidance of interpersonal conflict and excessive feelings of obligation. The reliance on others for feelings of

self-regard leaves these individuals vulnerable to signs of rejection in their role as caregivers, leading to emotional or mental problems.

Individuals who report high levels of both anxious concern and self-sacrificial care focus on others at the expense of self-regard. Unmitigated communion is associated with low self-disclosure, low self-assertion, discomfort in receiving support, and a desire that others take their advice. The pattern of overintrusiveness in others' problems combined with little social support seeking leaves these individuals at risk for a variety of mental and health problems, including depression.

### **Conclusions**

Efforts to instill virtuous character traits will be shallow unless a rich reflective understanding of the self and others that constitute such traits is nurtured. To this end, character education could profit from many aspects of the parent-child attachment paradigm. Intervention should aim at social intelligence and fostering healthy moral identities through promoting secure forms of attachment. Healthy adult partnerships and peer relationships can lead to positive changes. ❧

#### ***Nurturing Morality book***

A book presenting extended chapters derived from the Nurturing Morality conference will appear as:

Thorkildsen, T. A., Manning, J., & Walberg, H. J. (Eds.). (in press). *Nurturing morality*. Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers.

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# Stereotyping, Prejudice, and Discrimination

## The Effect of Group-based Expectations on Moral Functioning

Jennifer Steele, Y. Susan Choi, and Nalini Ambady, Harvard University

Stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination play important roles in maintaining inequalities between members of different social groups. For example, although American society has made much progress toward the moral ideal of equality, race continues to be linked to socioeconomic status and education level, with certain groups faring much better than others.

The terms *stereotypes*, *prejudice*, and *discrimination* are generally used by social psychologists to refer to cognitive, affective, and behavioral biases, respectively. These biases undermine the moral functioning of our meritocracy because individual efforts are often overshadowed by inaccurate perceptions and unfair expectations. In our effort to stay true to the ideals of our system, we must work to overcome the obstacles imposed by such biases.

### Stereotypes

*Stereotypes* are overgeneralized beliefs about a group of people. Stereotypes begin to form at an early age. Adults often view stereotypes as more *descriptive* of society, but very young children view stereotypes as socially *prescriptive*. Consequently, children's stereotypes help dictate their behavior. For example, children prefer stereotypically gender-appropriate toys by age 3 years and occupations by age 5 years.

Slightly later, children begin to form stereotypical beliefs regarding ethnicity. By age 5 years, most White American children attribute more positive characteristics to Whites and more negative characteristics to African Americans.

Children's early awareness of racial stereotypes makes them susceptible to the same biases that adults encounter.

Although stereotypes were initially believed to reflect faulty mental processing, social psychologists have recently argued that stereotypes are necessary and normal for cognitive functioning by providing expectations about new people and situations. However, mistakes abound when stereotypes are applied to individuals, leading to errors in people's perceptions of others, their memories, and their interpretations of ambiguous actions. For example, in recent studies, White Americans found acts more violent when perpetrated by African Americans than by Whites, and White children have demonstrated memory biases consistent with stereotypes about African Americans.

Stereotypes can also lead to *self-fulfilling prophecies* by creating expectations that guide perception and behavior in many social interactions. For example, studies have shown that inducing positive expectations in teachers can lead to increased student performance consistent with the expectations. Other studies have shown that during job interviews, interviewers' negative stereotypes about African Americans' competence elicits stereotype-consistent behavior in African American candidates, which leads to less favorable impressions.

Stereotypes can also lead to *stereotype threat*, the sense that one can be judged in terms of a stereotype or that one might inadvertently confirm a stereotype. Studies have

demonstrated how these overgeneralized beliefs can affect the academic performance of members of negatively stereotyped groups. Conversely, positive stereotypes can enhance performance; however, members of positively stereotyped groups may experience undue stress in trying to live up to these stereotypes.

### Prejudice

*Prejudice* is an emotion-driven expression or experience of a negative feeling toward another person or group based on group-based characteristics. Prejudice can lead to the dehumanization of others, intergroup hostility, violence, and even mass murder.

Prejudice can develop at an early age, especially for children surrounded by prejudicial family members and friends. For example, prejudiced mothers and authoritarian parents are more likely to have children who are prejudiced. Prejudice levels are high around age 5 years and usually decrease or become more flexible as children age. However, prejudice displayed in early childhood may return in the preteen years and beyond, particularly if prejudice is noticeable in the child's social environment.

With the recent spread of "political correctness" and egalitarian values, many people have become more hesitant about outwardly expressing prejudice. However, evidence suggests that people's true attitudes and behaviors do not always match these seemingly less prejudiced views.

*Aversive racists* strongly endorse egalitarian values and see

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themselves as nonprejudiced but harbor prejudicial attitudes, sometimes without even being fully aware that they do. This unrecognized racism leads to discrimination in situations in which it is possible to attribute negative reactions to nonracial factors. Therefore, researchers often measure subtle expressions of prejudice, including nonverbal behavior and social distance. Strongly endorsing egalitarian views is not enough to combat discrimination; aversive racism may actually be more difficult to eliminate than outright racism because it is hidden from observers and from aversive racists themselves. However, it is important to recognize that in today's society, old-fashioned prejudice still does exist and can lead to overt discrimination.

### Discrimination

*Discrimination* includes acting differently toward others based on stereotypes or prejudice, generally resulting in the denial of opportunities or resources. Discrimination can be overt, but it often takes a more subtle form, such as racial profiling of motorists, different car sales negotiations for women, less attention paid to girls in the classroom, lower wages paid to women, and less frequent job interviews for African American candidates. Discrimination can have extremely harmful effects on the recipients of this mistreatment; therefore, it is important to find ways to overcome the negative consequences of stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination.

### Overcoming Stereotypes, Prejudice, and Discrimination

It is clear that stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination can impede people's abilities to function morally. Inequalities can be sustained and justified if people fail to acknowledge how these processes

operate and if they choose not to take action. With this knowledge in mind, it is crucial to consider how to combat the negative effects of assessing individuals based on their group membership by examining how to reduce biases and how to strive to enhance others' moral development.

### INDIVIDUAL AWARENESS AND RESPONSIBILITY

One of the best ways to avoid being prejudiced is to simply make a concerted effort not to be. However, research has demonstrated that some approaches to this goal are more effective than others. For example, suppressing negative thoughts is not always useful because it may lead to hypersensitivity and perseverating about the stereotype.

A better way to reduce stereotyping is through *perspective taking*, or trying to mentally put oneself in another person's shoes and become aware of similarities to that person. Perspective taking is especially effective when coupled with an effort to think of people as unique individuals rather than members of stereotyped groups.

Researchers have also found that certain goals can help to combat stereotypes and prejudice. Specifically, when people have a strong commitment to egalitarian values, they work hard to prevent stereotypes from affecting their thoughts and behavior. *Chronic egalitarians* consider egalitarian goals as central to their identities and feel a sense of incompleteness when violating these goals. As opposed to aversive racists, chronic egalitarians have internalized their ideals and repeatedly strive to treat others fairly; this leads to a "blocking" of prejudiced responses that eventually becomes automatic.

Being aware of biases and making a concerted effort to overcome them are important first

steps toward society's moral ideal, but it is also essential to help others, especially children, to recognize their biases.

### EDUCATIONAL AND POLICY INTERVENTIONS

Interracial friendships can buffer prejudice. Contact with other groups is necessary, but it is most beneficial when it includes equal status in the setting, cooperation, and opportunities for stereotype disconfirmation and friendship development. Through contact, individuals come to realize that they share values and beliefs similar to those of members of other groups, and they start to have less anxiety when they are around members of other groups.

In educational settings, the jigsaw technique and the Teams-Games-Tournament program promote intergroup harmony through interdependence, cooperation, and the pursuit of common goals. Both techniques use small, diverse, and interdependent groups to promote positive cross-race interactions.

In racially homogeneous communities, interracial contact is possible through school pairing programs in which children are assigned pen pals or E-mail buddies from different communities. Classroom activities and educational television programs can also provide information about the accomplishments of diverse peoples and approaches to issues of difference.

Other techniques can help promote academic success among negatively stereotyped racial minority groups. For example, teachers who are optimistic about students' potential, provide challenging work, and promote the belief that intelligence is malleable have been found to be particularly effective in combating the effects of negative stereotypes.

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In addition to educational programs, policies that reflect current social realities must be promoted. For example, *affirmative action*, which gives special consideration to certain groups through recruiting efforts and preferential selection, can compensate for lifelong effects of stereotypes, subtle discrimination, and poor educational resources. Affirmative action has led to an increase in workforce participation among minorities and has increased the number of minority students in college. Such programs may also promote equality by providing opportunities for intergroup contact and increasing the visibility

of minorities in workplaces and classrooms.

However, continued disparities cast into doubt how successful affirmative action has been. Also, some have objected to what they see as “reverse discrimination,” and the beneficiaries of affirmative action can be subject to academic underperformance, negative self-views, and fears that success will be seen as undeserved or unearned. Policymakers have much to consider when establishing affirmative action programs, but when properly implemented, these programs have the potential to play a critical role in remedying inequalities.

## Conclusions

Perhaps one of the greatest challenges in promoting morality among today’s youth is the question of how best to handle intergroup relations in an increasingly diverse society. Although diversity can offer rich opportunities for learning and growth, it can also serve as fertile ground for stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination. With continued research and the application of findings, we will hopefully move closer to having a society in which differences do not lead to negativity but are instead valued and nurtured. ☞

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## Conflict and Morals

*Susan Opatow, University of Massachusetts—Boston*

Conflicts can inflict harm, but they also have positive potential. They can focus attention on urgent issues; spark creative energy; and, in organizations that serve youths, spark positive change. This paper describes conflict and morals and then discusses two separate research projects on peer conflict and class cutting, which are everyday conflicts in the lives of youths. A divergence in youth and adult perspectives exists in these conflicts that poses difficulties yet also offers opportunities. The paper concludes with suggestions for fostering constructive conflict processes and outcomes that can nurture the moral development of youths.

### What Is Conflict?

*Conflicts* arise from incompatibilities of interests, needs, and values. *Conflicts of interest* arise from genuine differences in wants and needs, from miscommunication, and from the failure to see possibilities for mutually satisfying

outcomes. They can be positive when parties seek to understand each other’s interests and find integrative, mutually satisfactory solutions.

*Conflicts of resources* dispute tangible or intangible resources that can meet individual or collective needs. They can be positive when they draw attention to perceptions of injustice. *Conflicts of values* debate moral priorities and are often salient in ethnic, religious, and political conflicts. These are conflicts in which violence can be extreme, but they can also be positive conflicts when they result in the legitimacy of greater diversity in community values. A particular conflict can be just one of these types, but many conflicts concern all three issues.

### What Are Morals?

Conflicts of interest, resources, and values all have a moral basis because they fundamentally concern perceptions of norms, rights, entitlements, obligations, responsibilities, and duties that shape people’s sense of justice and guide

their behavior with others. Perceptions that others have failed to fulfill their responsibilities or overstepped their entitlements can arouse a sense of injustice and even justify retaliatory actions to restore a sense of moral balance.

### What Is Moral About Conflict?

Conflicts can be constructive when they seek mutually beneficial processes and outcomes, but they can be destructive when they emphasize winning at the expense of adversaries. Moral understandings of conflict—moral judgments, norm violations, moral exclusion, and apology—can determine whether conflict takes a constructive or destructive course. *Moral judgments* assess the basis for a conflict, conflict behavior, and conflict outcomes. Moral judgments are subject to bias and are often more self-serving and subjective than is apparent to disputants. *Norm violations* can trigger a spiral of hostility, conflict escalation, and  
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violence. This is less likely to occur when norm violations are viewed as unintentional or transient and when parties have methods for redressing norm violations.

*Moral exclusion* occurs when considerations of fairness and moral rules are not seen as applicable to some kinds of people, such as those seen as morally irrelevant, nonentities, or enemies. Those who are morally excluded are eligible for extreme harm. Moral exclusion is an especially influential dynamic when conflict is destructive, and after it is in place, it can be difficult to reestablish cooperative and respectful relationships.

Lastly, an *apology* is a moral narrative about an acknowledged wrong that is intended to restore moral balance to damaged relationships.

### **Research on Youth Conflict**

In recent years, there have been too many instances of extreme youth violence such as the 1999 Columbine High School massacre that left 13 dead. Youth perpetrators of these kinds of massacres have justified their norm-violating violence with self-serving moral judgments. They have described themselves as outside their peers' scope of justice and, consequently, excluded their victims from their own scope of justice. These tragic, violent acts overshadow more mundane conflicts that many youths experience in their daily lives.

Two research projects were conducted on ordinary youth conflicts. One of the projects studied seventh graders' conflicts with peers. In the aftermath of peer conflicts, students experienced social isolation, confusion, anger, and stress. A positive outcome of these conflicts was that they piqued students' interest in defining unacceptable behaviors and in more clearly

delineating the basis of their moral judgments, social norms, and moral exclusion. Youths explained that talking about these conflicts helped them to better understand the nuances of the conflicts and their moral import and to better understand themselves.

Few students, however, reported discussing their peer conflicts with adults. Students stated that when school adults became involved, they responded punitively with rule enforcement and reduced youths' sense of autonomy. In interviews conducted with teachers and administrators, adults described youths' peer conflicts as transient, silly, and having the potential to harm students and to disrupt the school.

Another research project examined high school students' reasons for cutting class (i.e., discretionary class attendance), a prevalent problem, particularly in urban public schools. Students described class cutting as a response to classes, teachers, or school rules they did not like. Students said that because they were unable to effect changes that could solve their problems or change how the school did things, they chose self-help, and they cut classes.

Interviews conducted with teachers and administrators indicated that they saw class cutting as a result of students' immaturity, shortsightedness, poor decision making, inadequate academic preparation, and poor work habits. Schools often responded to class cutting with threats and punishment. When students saw these responses as unfair, they became increasingly alienated from school.

### **Using Student Conflict to Nurture Morality in Youths**

Youths and adults clearly differ in their understanding of peer

conflict and class cutting. They understand these conflicts from different perspectives: Youths are participants, and adults are bystanders. Bystanders to conflict can offer alternate views and broader perspectives, but bystanders cannot be aware of the nuances of the conflict (e.g., history, feelings, repercussions) that are experienced by participants.

Moreover, moral judgments, norms, and criteria for apology in conflict, particularly those occurring in school, differ for adults and youths. Although youths understand the relevant institutional norms, adults are often less aware of youths' norms. Therefore, adults can intervene more helpfully in youth conflict when they understand that the nuances of conflict can be complex and that one's own set of conflict norms are not definitive.

Peer conflicts and class cutting are relatively pervasive, and in both, students engage in self-help. Self-help is problematic because it does not offer youths alternative or mature perspectives that could generate self-, social, and moral learning. In both kinds of conflict, moral questions were salient for youths. After the conflict, they ruminated about what was right, what was fair, and how things should have been done. When adults respond with judgments about individual inadequacy and rule breaking, they delegitimize the conflict and its moral meaning for youths.

If these differences in perspective are bridged, youths would have the opportunity to reflect on moral issues in their conflicts (i.e., right and wrong, norms, responsibilities) with adults as teachers and guides. Without a forum for this kind of helpful and reflective discussion, opportunities to examine issues of moral import to students can be

lost. Although peer mediation programs offer one venue for handling students' conflicts, they are more appropriate for conflicts of interests or resources that lend themselves to compromise and concrete agreements than for conflicts of morals, values, and norms, which do not. Also, peer mediation programs rarely include opportunities for in-depth reflection with adults concerning conflicts.

### Implications for Practice

This research suggests that adults who talk with youths about conflict should be comfortable with conflict and knowledgeable about its complexities. Institutionalizing the acquisition of constructive conflict skills can permit students and adults to understand and address conflicts constructively in ways that nurture cooperative relationships and moral learning. Adults who respond to

youth conflict can model constructive conflict skills. They can do so by acknowledging whose conflicts they are; permitting parties in conflicts to shape their own conflict experiences and outcomes; and offering a safety net to disputants, if needed. Interventions model constructive conflict when they are cooperative rather than unilateral, when they are flexible and creative rather than rigid, and when they use soft (i.e., persuasive) rather than harsh (i.e., authoritarian) influence strategies.

### Conclusions

Because conflicts can generate discomfort and pain, the urge to control, manage, and resolve them can seem urgent. However, when we approach conflicts more gently, they can be opportunities to improve communication, develop a wider social perspective, and en-

gage in creative problem solving. Conflicts are resources because they provide opportunities to disturb our assumptions, expectancies, and stereotypes.

Conflicts also disturb social routines, offering junctures for collaboratively, cooperatively, and constructively approaching the challenges that youths face in their everyday lives. Youth conflicts are opportunities for youths to connect with the moral issues underlying conflict and with the adults who can influence their lives. If parents, teachers, administrators, counselors, and other adults who work with youths are attuned to these challenges and to the productive potential of conflict, they can better help youths. This kind of help can nurture morality in the moments when it is most crucial and salient. ☘

## Prosocial and Moral Development in the Family

*Nancy Eisenberg, Arizona State University*

Heredity probably plays some role in the development of moral behavior, with genetics affecting children's tendencies to experience emotions and their ability to regulate their emotions and behaviors. Children's temperaments also affect how parents interact with and attempt to socialize them. In addition, children's socialization within the family is an important contributor to moral development, and parents are likely to affect their children's moral development in numerous ways.

### Development of Conscience

The development of conscience begins in infancy. In fearful infants, the development of conscience seems to be promoted by their mothers' use of gentle discipline. In contrast, fearless infants benefit

from a positive parent-child relationship that involves cooperation and secure attachment.

Young children's consciences often reflect parental standards; at older ages, values derived from other people and sources likely contribute to children's consciences. The conscience restrains antisocial behavior and destructive impulses and promotes children's compliance with adults' rules and standards, even when no one is monitoring their behavior. The conscience can also foster prosocial behavior by causing children to feel guilty when they engage in uncaring or hurtful behavior or do not live up to their internalized values.

Children are more likely to take on their parents' moral values if their parents do not use excessive physical punishment but instead use

discipline that deemphasizes parental power. Parents' explanations help children to understand and internalize parental values, although primarily when the parents' messages are clear and consistent, perceived as appropriate, and motivate the child. Furthermore, secure, positive parent-child relationships provide the basis for the young children's openness to parental communications about (and enforcement of) parents' values.

### Empathy-related Responding and Prosocial Behavior

Sympathetic infants are more likely than other children to engage in prosocial behavior. *Prosocial behavior* is voluntary behavior intended to benefit another, and it

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can be motivated by egoistic concern, other-oriented concern, or moral values. *Altruistic behaviors* are prosocial behaviors motivated by other-oriented or moral concerns rather than by concrete or social rewards or the desire to reduce aversive affective states.

Sympathetic, prosocial children tend to have secure attachments with their parents, and their parents tend to be warm and supportive. These parents also tend to model and value prosocial behavior and to use disciplinary practices that promote the development of a conscience and sympathy for others.

#### QUALITY OF THE PARENT–CHILD RELATIONSHIP

Positive, secure relationships with parents seem to provide the foundation for children’s moral development. Moreover, maternal expression of general positive emotion and mothers’ tolerance of children’s unharmed negative emotions have been linked to higher sympathy in children.

When parents are supportive *and* use effective practices, such as modeling and reasoning, children are likely to be relatively prosocial. Children are less likely to be socially responsible and prosocial if their parents are nurturant but fail to set high standards, model prosocial behaviors, or use practices that induce their children to consider others’ needs and perspectives.

Children with warm parents seem to feel good about their parents and are receptive to parental influence, increasing the effectiveness of parents’ child-rearing practices.

Children’s prosocial behavior can also elicit warm and supportive behavior from parents who might otherwise seem cold and non-supportive. Moreover, because children tend to be close to warm parents and because these children’s emotional

needs are more likely to be met, they seem to acquire a greater capacity to care about others.

#### MODELING AND PREACHING

Children imitate the behaviors of other people, particularly important, powerful, and nurturant people. Additionally, most children want to behave in a competent manner and may believe that adults’ behaviors are good examples. Children are sometimes rewarded for imitating adults. Adults’ modeling of altruism seems to have a greater influence on children’s behavior if there is a close bond between the adult and the child.

Adults can also enhance prosocial behavior by providing preachings that point out the effects of the child’s behavior on others and capitalize on the child’s capacity for empathy. However, hypocritical socializers may have little positive effect on children’s prosocial development.

#### INSTRUCTIONS TO HELP AND PRACTICE BY DOING

Children are more likely to help or share with others if adults instruct them to do so. Studies have shown that young children who are instructed to share tend to do so even in private, and the effects of the instructions may last for weeks. Instructing children to assist others may promote prosocial behavior because it helps them practice these behaviors. Children who are routinely assigned responsibilities that involve helping others are more prosocial.

Additionally, children who have opportunities to help others may learn new helping skills, receive social approval or help from others, and discover that they often feel good when helping others. They may also come to think of themselves as being helpful people and, consequently, engage in more prosocial behavior. However, children are unlikely to think that

they really want to help others if they believe that they were forced to assist others. Also, these constraining instructions seem to become less effective as children grow older.

#### DISCIPLINE

Prosocial children tend to have parents and caregivers who use reasoning rather than punishment or material rewards for discipline. The use of reasoning in discipline can promote children’s understanding of others’ thoughts and feelings and of the consequences of their behavior for others. The use of physical punishment or threats focuses children’s attention on the self rather than others and has been associated with low levels of prosocial behavior.

#### REINFORCEMENT

An effective way to increase the frequency of desired behaviors may be to reward children with material or social rewards. These rewards promote prosocial actions, at least in the short term. Social rewards may have stronger long-term effects on children’s prosocial behavior than do material rewards.

Additionally, praise that attributes children’s behavior to internal motives may be more effective than praise that merely labels a behavior as positive. Material rewards for children’s prosocial actions sometimes undermine the development of altruism because children may come to believe that they assist others primarily to receive rewards.

#### **Socialization of Moral Judgment**

##### PROMOTION OF AUTONOMOUS THINKING

Some evidence suggests that parents who encourage their children’s participation in discussions and decision making are more likely to have children who reason at relatively high levels of moral reasoning. Conversely, simply providing information or critiquing and

directly challenging children have not been associated with children's moral growth. Moreover, parents' presentation of higher level reasoning predicts the development of children's higher level moral judgment.

#### DISCIPLINARY PRACTICES

Children who exhibit a relatively high level of moral reasoning tend to have parents who favor inductive discipline and use relatively little power-assertive, punitive discipline. However, parents' overall styles of parenting, more than any one disciplinary practice, may be associated with children's moral reasoning.

Parents who use an authoritative parenting style (i.e., reasonable control combined with warmth) are more likely to have children who exhibit high-level moral judgment than are parents who are less authoritative in their discipline.

#### EMOTIONAL ENVIRONMENT

Parental warmth likely provides an optimal environment for socialization because children are more likely to attend to parents and care about pleasing them when the relationship is generally close and supportive. In fact, the limited research suggests that parental warmth is associated with higher level moral reasoning in children. It is possible that parental warmth does not exert a direct effect on children's moral reasoning but instead enhances the effectiveness of other constructive parental practices in fostering the growth of moral reasoning. Moreover, it is likely that parental warmth encourages children's involvement in productive moral discussions.

#### RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PARENTS' AND CHILDREN'S MORAL REASONING

A number of investigators have examined whether parents' level of moral judgment is related to the level

of their children's moral reasoning. A positive relationship between the two could be caused by several factors, including (1) similarity between parents' and children's cognitive abilities and (2) the idea that parents with higher level moral reasoning may promote their children's moral reasoning by stimulating their cognitive conflict or using optimal child-rearing practices.

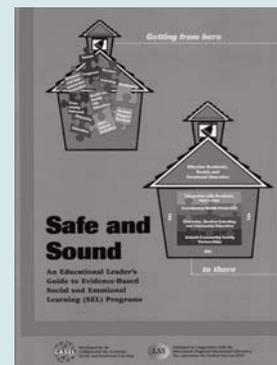
Although findings have been inconsistent, a weak positive relationship may exist between children's and parents' moral reasoning; parents who have higher moral judgment tend to have children with correspondingly high levels.

#### Conclusions

Parental techniques that foster children's ability to sympathize with others likely play an important role in the development of prosocial behavior. One of the most effective ways to enhance children's prosocial responding, reduce aggression, and promote children's social competence is to use child-rearing practices that help children understand others' perspectives and empathize and sympathize with them.

Socializers can facilitate empathy training by highlighting everyday acts of kindness. Disciplinary situations also provide excellent opportunities for encouraging children to take others' perspectives and sympathize with them. These techniques enhance the development of sympathy and prosocial behaviors based on caring rather than the desire to avoid punishment or for rewards or approval.

Moreover, it is helpful for parents and other socializers to talk about their own feelings, perspectives, and reasons for helping others. All of these techniques likely contribute to the development of children's conscience, sympathy, and prosocial behavior and perhaps even their moral reasoning. ❧



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# Moral Functioning in School

Theresa A. Thorkildsen, University of Illinois at Chicago

To contribute to society, most individuals move beyond a preoccupation with moral conduct and character to consider how institutional practices facilitate or undermine moral functioning. Schools can help students expand their knowledge of personalities and can foster a greater awareness of how societal institutions influence thoughts, feelings, and actions. This paper outlines some of the discoveries made in school by students whose moral choices and behavior are guided by their internal norms.

Individuals construct internal norms that serve as a knowledge-driven force compelling social participation. *Moral engagement* is the name currently given to this force. Moral engagement in school involves the coordination of knowledge about personality and institutional structures. Young people learn to differentiate between features of personality (conduct and identity) and institutional structures (epistemological and justice concerns) to construct complex representations of schooling.

## Conduct and Identity

Knowledge of conduct, conscience, and identity develops slowly even though observers are able to see individual differences in personality at all ages. Students typically coordinate details from three systems of moral thought and three types of motivational needs when constructing internal norms about personalities.

Common moral systems focus on individuals' reasons for doing and being good and methods for evaluating conduct. Students may focus on a moral system that involves *obedience for its own sake* and the search for evidence that rules are enforced. Youths who rely

on this system may obey rules without reflecting on the rules' purpose. A second system involves *instrumental reasons for doing good* to get something in return. In this system, students' moral choices tend to be directly aligned with their interests, and they barter for personal gain without thinking about collective agendas. The third moral system involves *interpersonal conformity* in which students are concerned with doing good to please others. Students who rely on this system adhere to social norms, explore common notions of good and bad behavior, and may be uncomfortable when their conduct disappoints others.

Common motivational needs direct students' internal strivings as they relate to the establishment of a comfortable identity. The need for *self-determination* is essential for moral functioning because it requires individuals to determine if they can succeed at assigned tasks and select their own identity-enhancing interests. Self-determination compels students to regulate their own behavior, make responsible choices, and avoid relying exclusively on the edicts of powerful others. *Competence* needs involve the satisfaction of demonstrating moral and intellectual expertise. When learning something new, students can feel competent when a task is intrinsically meaningful or they can feel competent when they outperform others and avoid appearing incompetent. *Affiliation* needs involve the frequency and quality of interpersonal relationships. Students differ in their preferences for the intimacy of friendship and the impersonal features of exchange relationships.

The three moral systems and three motivational needs interact as

young people discover the difference between conduct and identity. Students differ in whether they are concerned with obedience for its own sake, instrumental exchange, or pleasing others. They also differ in the degree to which they strive for self-determination, competence, and affiliation. Despite differences in how students organize their thoughts, moral and motivational orientations are features of moral engagement that compel their participation in school.

Marked individual differences exist in students' willingness and ability to reflect on and discuss these personality features, but school is one place where they can strengthen their internal norms. Educators often encourage students to reflect on the reasons for their behavior and imagine rules that can facilitate greater levels of self-regulation. They also encourage students to reveal their personalities when choosing assignments and particular work habits. In doing so, educators acknowledge students' developing moral acumen without deviating too far from the manifest purpose of school. If educators simply direct students' attention to personal needs, however, they may minimize important opportunities for discovering the role of societal practices in morality.

## Epistemology and Institutional Practices

Most students are busy learning about the forms of knowledge to be acquired, definitions of particular situations, and the consequences implicit in educational practices, even if educators do not always acknowledge these discoveries. When making judgments about how to respond to particular events, persons, or requests, students

usually integrate their knowledge of variability in conduct and personality with knowledge of how schools are and should be organized. The resulting internal norms can take many forms, but common questions related to such norms can be identified.

Students' awareness of epistemology is evident in their critiques of the curriculum. They quickly learn that educational agendas contain moral content, either because educators call attention to such themes or out of natural curiosity. Most students agree that all forms of knowledge are important, but they each have different ways of prioritizing controversial topics, matters of logic or fact, and intellectual conventions.

Conversations about what knowledge is of most worth invariably include critiques of how such knowledge should be taught. Before exploring educational practices, it is helpful to determine if readily identifiable structures exist in school. Students and adults typically see that school involves learning, test, and contest situations and share common definitions of these educational structures. When asked to prioritize these situations, most people see learning as more important than tests or contests but recognize that all three types of situations serve important purposes.

Marked age differences exist in students' evaluations of classroom practices. Determining if classrooms are well organized involves the consideration of corrective, distributive, procedural, and commutative justice.

*Corrective justice* involves the regulation of conduct, and age-related differences in youths' reasoning are parallel to differences in their understanding of intentionality and authority. Knowledge of intentionality and authority constrains students' reasoning about punishment, reward, and reconciliation.

*Distributive justice* involves the allocation of resources. Age-related differences in youths' reasoning are parallel to differences in their understanding of privilege, equity, equality, and need. People usually recognize that situations pull for different distribution rules, but whereas younger students emphasize simple equality, older students emphasize merit.

Reasoning about fair ways to organize learning, tests, and contests has been documented in studies of *procedural justice*. Age differences in reasoning about fair teaching practices are typically parallel to differences in reasoning about motivational concepts such as intelligence, ability, effort, luck, and skill. Students' motivational knowledge constrains their ability to determine which procedures will ultimately lead to successful goal attainment.

Finally, reasoning about the role of school in society falls under the purview of *commutative justice* because it involves a perspective that is more general than day-to-day events. Age-related differences in students' reasoning seem to be associated with their understanding of how particular institutions function in society; younger students have greater difficulty imagining a society without schools than do older students, but even many adults find it difficult to imagine such a world.

Educators encourage students to reflect on the nature and purpose of school by engaging them in conversations about why particular agendas are important. Students learn how different teachers balance educational concerns. Teachers place different priorities on learning, test, and contest situations in ways that pull for different approaches to fairness. Classrooms differ in their emphasis on equality in academic attainment, self-determination, and communication. Daily conversations among teachers and students

offer rich information concerning educational norms that can be incorporated into students' moral engagement.

### **Personal and Collective Agendas**

Schools are responsible for helping students learn to read, write, and compute, but many educators also accept responsibility for nurturing wise, just, and competent people. Educational activities occur regardless of whether students fully participate in them, and students' moral engagement serves as a drive that influences their likelihood of participating. Three collective agendas, when considered in combination, can help students learn how to coordinate personal and school knowledge and sustain high levels of moral engagement. First, definitions of equal educational opportunity that maintain that all students will attain optimal levels of motivation are more likely to nurture moral functioning than those emphasizing equality of test scores; confidence flourishes when students feel empowered to make moral and intellectual choices, understand their competence, and feel connected with one another.

Second, educators can create stimulating environments and encourage everyone to label the educative features of those environments; challenging students with perspectives they had not considered can encourage richer states of reflection than ignoring students' thoughts.

Finally, calling attention to moral agency—playfully comparing word and deed—can help students work through conflict rather than seethe with anger and resentment from feeling helpless, incompetent, or lonely. Modeling can be an outstanding form of support for morality, but preserving freedom of inquiry in a stimulating environment can foster moral development. ☞

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# Religious Participation and the Development of Moral Identity in Adolescence

*Daniel Hart, Rutgers University; Robert Atkins, Temple University; and Harrod Suarez and Kelly Beckwith, Rutgers University*

Most Americans presume that religion contributes to the public good and to ethical life. In a recent national poll, 70% of Americans reported that they wanted religion's influence to grow, and 76% of those advocating for greater religious influence claimed that religious denomination does not matter. In light of this context, this paper examines how religion influences moral development—specifically, moral identity formation—in the hopes of contributing to a constructive public debate on the role of religion in fostering youths' moral development.

## The Development of Moral Identity

How does moral identity—commitment to action on behalf of others consistent with the sense of self—develop? Several factors contribute to this development; they are presented here in the order of generally increasing potential and immediacy of effect.

Considerable evidence indicates that personality and temperamental factors influence moral judgment, moral emotion, and moral action. Children and adolescents who are capable of regulating their emotions and are sympathetic to others are more likely to develop moral features. However, the connection of personality or temperament to an enduring commitment to work on behalf of others is not consistent and, therefore, generally not greatly efficacious in developing moral identity.

Culture and social class also shape moral identity. Religion can be

considered a type of culture, and similarities in religion can produce similarities in moral judgment, even among individuals from different countries. Socioeconomic class may influence moral identity. Class may affect, for example, a community's ability to provide structured support for youths because urban neighborhoods usually have fewer adults to run organizations than do suburban neighborhoods.

Moral identity also rests partly on an individual's ability to make moral judgments—usually of an unsophisticated nature—and on one's social attitudes. Both of these factors can be empirically linked and constitute moral behavior and, by extension, contribute to moral identity. Moral identity also includes components of the sense of self. Research on adolescents dedicated to prosocial action demonstrates that moral commitment is sustained partly by a prominent ideal self that has moral content. Having this kind of ideal self leads to moral evaluation of oneself; one's moral ideals, which partly regulate self-esteem, are central components of moral identity.

The final factor in developing a moral identity is having opportunities to witness others with sustained prosocial action and to explore similar activities. Moral exemplars typically report that their parents exhibited considerable concern for others, and research on the precursors to community service reveals that neighborhood social institutions link adolescents with opportunities to explore prosocial action. Indeed, adolescents who

belong to clubs and teams are more than twice as likely as those who do not to volunteer for community service, and significantly, adolescents who participate at least weekly in religious observances are four times more likely to be involved in community service than teens who do not participate in such observances.

## Paths of Influence from Religion to Moral Identity

Religion is often associated with many of the components of moral identity development already outlined; however, religion's observance probably has relatively little direct influence on broad personality traits and temperamental qualities. Studies reveal that religious participation among adults is largely independent of personality. In addition, it does not appear that income or social class mediates religion's association with moral identity development. It is possible that those who regularly attend church have higher incomes than those who attend infrequently, but income differences between deeply religious people and nonreligious individuals are relatively minor and do not fully explain differences in community service participation.

Nevertheless, religion has an enormous influence on the development of moral identity, and this influence probably occurs along two paths. First, religion highlights moral issues. Adolescents who attend church or religious instruction are regularly exposed to moral claims, an exposure that is likely to bring to the foreground the moral dimension in

life and prepares them to discern moral issues in situations in which other adolescents perceive only social convention or self-interest. Second, during religious participation, thoughtful reflection about moral issues can take place; this reflection can be essential for developing moral judgment.

However, religious participation does not guarantee that sophisticated moral judgment will emerge. Ideally, worldviews provided by religion are interactively linked with moral judgment, so that worldviews inform moral judgments, which in turn produce adjustments in worldviews. In reality, religious worldviews can become so embedded in people's minds that no adjustments are possible; the consequence is that moral judgments cannot be fine tuned by people's experiences.

Research has demonstrated, for example, that fundamentalist religious affiliation typically precludes refined moral judgments because the development of such judgments is based on principles that are socially negotiated among autonomous moral agents; fundamentalist religions usually deny such autonomy.

Religion's effects are clearly seen in areas of social judgment that may combine moral issues with issues of social convention (e.g., dress, sexual relationships, drug use). Although important for understanding adolescent lives, social judgments that overlap moral issues but that are largely concerned with social conventions are probably peripheral for tracking the development of moral identity.

The fusing of moral goals with the sense of self is key to the development of a moral identity. The pursuit of moral goals is often accompanied by some hardships and self-sacrifice, so these goals must be viewed as fundamentally important if they are to continue to motivate behavior. Moral goals that are

psychologically important and linked to one's evaluation of oneself have this quality. Moral exemplars studied by other researchers, as well as adolescents in our own work, were found to exhibit this connection between goals and the sense of self.

We believe that religion can forge bonds between moral goals (e.g., advancing the welfare of others) and the sense of self. Because each religion constitutes a worldview offering answers to the existential questions of life, moral goals that are aligned with the worldview can become synthesized with elements of self-identity.

Such bonds can be exemplified in a study of the benefits of religious participation in nearly 100,000 adolescents that found problematic behavior is lower among religious youths than among nonreligious youths. This benefit is a consequence of a greater number of supportive social relationships available to religious youths, which likely aid this synthesis.

Additionally, many religious communities are deeply involved in charitable work, which helps young people explore prosocial action. The opportunities to witness and to explore prosocial activity make religious participation a powerful influence on adolescents' moral identity formation. All of our research indicates that commitment to working toward the welfare of others is not fully determined by temperament nor by social class. Instead, sustained prosocial action can overlay most configurations of traits and social structure if these actions are initiated and sustained by social relationships. Religious participation in adolescence provides this social context.

### **Summary and Implications**

Researchers have largely ignored religion's effects on psychological functioning, so additional research is

needed. Nevertheless, several conclusions can be formed. First, because moral identity has consequences for psychological and social functioning, we should care about moral identity development in adolescence. Moral identity is linked to individual resilience and social capital, and adolescents with moral identities are less likely to be involved in problem behaviors. Additionally, many impoverished cities could benefit from the contributions of youths' prosocial action.

Second, religion's influence on adolescents' moral identity formation is likely to be most beneficial when moral issues are discussed in ways that incorporate worldviews and moral intuitions, the synthesis of the self's aspirations with moral goals is supported, and opportunities for prosocial action are regularly provided. Religious groups can directly contribute to moral identity development by recruiting adolescents to perform community service.

Finally, providing adolescents with opportunities to join groups in which they can form relationships with peers and adults that lead to prosocial activity can provide much of the benefit of religious participation for moral identity formation to nonreligious youths. Many groups already provide these opportunities, but additional clubs and organizations serving adolescents would enhance access. ☘

### **Upcoming LSS Book Release**

Stull, W.J., & Sanders, N. M. (Eds.). (2003). *The school-to-work movement: Origins, accomplishments, and destinations*. Westport, CT: Praeger.

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# Institutional Support for Morality

## Community-based and Neighborhood Organizations

*Constance Flanagan, Penn State University*

Because individuals reap the benefits of collective goods whether or not they participate in the political process, rational choice theory suggests that is smart for citizens to refrain from community involvement. However, millions of citizens do participate in community-based or neighborhood organizations (CBOs), mainly because of the satisfaction derived. Youth participation in CBOs and extracurricular activities is a precursor to civic engagement in adulthood, although it is not clear why. This paper discusses three reasons for the role of CBOs in civic engagement and argues that each is a way that CBOs nurture morality.

### **Prosocial and Constructive Use of Leisure Time**

CBOs provide a prosocial outlet for the use of leisure time. Because most juvenile misdemeanors occur from 3:00 to 6:00 p.m., when youths tend to be on their own, more prosocial outlets for the use of this leisure time could reduce offenses. This time niche is filled by many after-school clubs and CBOs. Youths who are involved in these groups are less likely to be involved in antisocial activities or substance abuse. However, sports participation may be an exception because of the status of sports in the hierarchy of social cliques and popular students' inclination to drink. Competition, an absence of team spirit, and uneven enforcement of rules characterize some sports programs. The relationship of sports to moral or civic development may also depend on the participants' motivation for playing and on the importance of winning. Team starters may be less trusting and more committed to winning.

Community-based youth organizations (CBYOs) promote connection to community institutions. When adults, communities, and institutions communicate a message that youths matter, youths are more likely to develop an affinity for and a sense of obligation to the polity. The absence of such ties is a problem for communities, making youths feel disaffected or alienated.

The informal and less hierarchical structures of CBOs are better suited to nurturing affective ties than are schools. Black youths in low-income urban communities were found to feel more respected by adults, more comfortable with and trusting of peers, and more accepted in CBOs. These associations also benefit the common good because when people believe that their decisions matter, they are more likely to take active roles in community affairs.

CBYOs' opportunities for social connection may be especially important for marginalized youths such as juvenile offenders. For example, restorative justice practices emphasize youths' obligations to repair the harm done to victims and the community, and service done in the company of law-abiding adults strengthens cross-generational relationships. Even when service learning opportunities do not increase the prosocial behavior of their peers, they are effective with at-risk youths. For older adolescents, community service participation significantly reduces the likelihood of arrest in early adulthood.

### **Membership and Solidarity**

A second reason that participation in CBYOs predicts adult civic engagement is that these organiza-

tions nurture a sense of collective identity and obligation to the group. Among adults, a sense of collective identity motivates action on behalf of the group; among adolescents, this sense is associated with commitments to public interest goals. Additionally, citizenship is based on the bonds felt toward others and is considered a human strength or virtue. Good citizens are self-transcendent, which is a characteristic of self-actualizing people.

CBYOs allow youths to explore communities beyond their families. And although membership in families is a given, membership in CBOs is earned. Youths typically work in groups, define projects together, and hold one another accountable, thereby shaping character and teaching lessons about trustworthiness.

Youths also learn to work through differences in CBYOs. Unlike the unequal power structures of families and schools, CBYOs' members are equal. Thus, CBYOs afford unique opportunities to practice democratic skills and gain experience in admitting and resolving disputes. The transition from unequal adult-child relationships to equal peer relationships constitutes a change in youths' conceptions of themselves and an appreciation of others' rights and perspectives. CBYOs socialize participants into norms of reciprocity and trust, which are the basis for democracy.

However, a level playing field is not the norm in all CBYOs, so adults may need to intervene. When adults insist that tolerance and civility are essential, youths are more likely to feel committed to goals that benefit everyone. But for youths to really practice leadership

and group decision making, adults must remain in the background. Youths want adults to provide dialogue, coaching, and connections to power, but youths envision a framework of equality and mutual respect in which everyone is governed by the same rules.

### **Trust**

Finally, participation in CBYOs, especially those that include a community service component, nurtures social trust (i.e., a belief that most people are fair, helpful, and trustworthy). Adults who are more trusting are more likely to join community groups; reciprocally, involvement in community groups increases participants' beliefs that most people are trustworthy. Social trust is lower among socially isolated adults who watch a lot of television. In addition, teenagers who are not involved in organizations are likely to spend a lot of time alone watching TV. One study of fifth to eighth graders found an inverse relationship between interpersonal trust and TV viewing, perhaps explained by the negative views of humanity on the news and entertainment TV. By contrast, in CBOs, the time spent getting familiar with others, who are usually not out for their own gain, reinforces a more positive view of humanity.

Exclusionary groups undermine democracy. To build a polity, trust has to be extended beyond people's closest associates, and the relationships between groups must be full and free. Community service is one of the few opportunities youths have to interact with people who are different from themselves; evidence suggests that youth who engage in community service have higher levels of tolerance. This interaction benefits youths' attitudes about cultural diversity, and tolerance helps reduce racial prejudice. In fact, engaging in community service may promote three changes

associated with social trust development: (1) encounters with individual members of stereotyped groups may cause stereotypes to break down; (2) youths' conceptions of the circle of humanity to whom they are obliged enlarges, and they gain a greater appreciation that they, too, could someday need help from others; and (3) participation in community service exposes youths to adults who devote their lives to benefiting others, enhancing youths' social trust.

### **Schools of Democracy**

CBYOs foster character by integrating youths into social norms and promoting positive character traits such as a sense of duty and responsibility to the common good. CBYOs also stabilize political and social systems. The identities and histories of these organizations help youths appreciate that they are part of a community. This affinity with the community and nation also provides a solid foundation for the political system.

Politics includes the allocation of values, and political life concerns activities that influence society's values. The principles of a social order guide the goals and practices of formative institutions, and children's social theories incorporate the norms, expectations, and justifications learned in these environments. As in society at large, in CBYOs, the principles of the social order are constantly reconstructed and challenged, so CBYOs are constantly evolving.

A new model of CBYOs responds to marginalized youths and is geared toward social justice. The new model and effective older ones have some consistent features. Leaders are held accountable on the basis of commitment to the group. Young leaders evolve with the good of the group at the forefront of their attention; otherwise, peers censure them for acting in their own self-

interest. The organizations are democratic with no single person or group in charge. Members are able to practice a range of roles, helping them gain competencies and broaden their perspectives; because of the graduated responsibilities, older and more experienced youths often remain in the organizations. The organizations are structured with a small set of rules that are collectively generated, emphasize the equal status of members, and hold all members accountable. Also, youths have real roles in organizational governance. Finally, CBYOs provide benefits or useful products to the community.

Participation in politics and CBYOs reflects class disparities in society. Youths are more likely to be involved in CBYOs and extracurricular activities when their parents are involved in CBOs or reinforce their children's involvement. Also, because socially advantaged communities have the financial and demographic resources to support organizations, youths from these communities are more likely to be involved in CBYOs. However, evidence suggests that adults overcome class disparities in political participation through the skills they learn in faith-based groups. More opportunities for youths from less advantaged communities to participate in CBYOs may eventually help to redress socioeconomic inequities in political participation in society.

Community associations can be seen as "schools of democracy" in which citizens from different backgrounds meet to resolve issues of common concern. The dispositions of citizens are shaped by their practices. The ties people feel with others through such associations moderate Americans' tendency to self-interest and independence. In this sense, CBOs and CBYOs provide institutional support for morality, nurturing a belief that bearing the cost is part of the benefit. ☞

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# Wisdom as a Moral Virtue

Robert J. Sternberg and Steven E. Stemler, Yale University

Wisdom is a moral virtue, but not in the narrow sense of morality that we learn when authority figures advise us. Rather, wise people have a compass for making moral judgments that recognizes that moral principles need a set of guidelines for their application. Wisdom supplies these guidelines. In the absence of wisdom, morality can be severely distorted.

## The Nature of Wisdom

Wisdom can be defined as the application of intelligence and creativity as mediated by values toward the achievement of a common good through a balance of intrapersonal, interpersonal, and extrapersonal interests. Wisdom is applied over the short and long terms in order to achieve a balance among adaptation to existing environments, shaping of existing environments, and selection of new environments. Thus, wisdom is not just about maximizing one's own or someone else's interests; wise people seek a common good, realizing that this common good may be better for some than for others.

Some may argue that the definition of common good is morally relative; however, consensus exists across religions, cultures, and geographies regarding principles such as honesty, reciprocity, sincerity, integrity, and compassion. Although morality impacts distinctions between right and wrong in particular circumstances, wisdom is broader in scope. Wisdom and morality overlap in that the degree to which people are wise decision makers is influenced by their moral functioning. People with a strong moral sense are more likely to adhere to most of the universal principles that define the

common good within the framework of wisdom; however, morality in itself does not always lead to wise decision making.

Wisdom manifests itself as a series of cyclical higher order processes that can occur in different orders. These processes include recognizing the existence of a problem, defining the nature of the problem, representing information about the problem, formulating a strategy for solving the problem, allocating resources, monitoring the solution, and evaluating feedback about the solution

## Wisdom-related Skills

Wisdom requires many distinct skills. First, it requires knowledge regarding applicable topics. *Formal knowledge* is learned in school and through reading, and *informal knowledge* is gained through experience. Second, wisdom requires analytical thinking regarding real-world dilemmas. Third, wisdom requires creativity because it generates novel, problem-relevant, high-quality solutions involving a balancing of interests. However, because intellectual problems may not require a balancing of interests or a search for a common good, they do not always require wisdom. Fourth, wisdom requires practical thinking, which helps people solve problems and apply knowledge in useful contexts. Fifth, wisdom is related to social and emotional intelligence. But whereas social intelligence can be applied to understanding and getting along with others to any ends, for any purposes, wisdom seeks out a common good through a balancing of interests. Emotional intelligence involves understanding, judging, and regulating emotions, which are

important parts of wisdom; however, wisdom goes beyond this and also requires processing information to achieve a balance of interests and formulating a judgment that makes effective use of information to achieve a common good.

Whereas wisdom is applied toward the achievement of ends that are perceived as yielding a common good, the various kinds of intelligences may be applied deliberately toward achieving either good or bad ends. Furthermore, the preceding constructs are not necessarily driven by an underlying moral framework or values system, but wisdom is inextricably bound to—and mediated by—values.

## Foolishness

Foolishness is the absence of wisdom. Smart people can be foolish and are sometimes especially susceptible to foolishness, especially when they are in leadership positions. Leaders must be especially vigilant to guard against four fallacies in thinking.

The *fallacy of egocentrism* occurs when an individual believes that the world centers around him or her and sees other people as merely tools in the attainment of goals. Smart people have been so highly rewarded for being smart that they sometimes lose sight of their own limitations; this process leads to the second fallacy.

The *fallacy of omniscience* results from having available essentially any knowledge one might want to know. People look up to leaders as knowledgeable or even all-knowing, and some leaders start to believe that they really do know everything. Brilliant leaders have often made foolish decisions, partly

because they believed they knew more than they did.

The *fallacy of omnipotence* results from extreme power. In certain domains, a powerful person can do essentially almost whatever he or she wants to do. The risk is that the individual will start to overgeneralize and believe that this high power applies in all domains.

The *fallacy of invulnerability* comes from an illusion of complete protection, such as from a huge staff. Leaders often have many friends ready to protect them, but when things turn bad, many individuals who once seemed to be friends prove to be anything but.

Foolishness involves interests going out of balance, with the individual usually placing self-interests above other interests. Similarly, people occasionally sacrifice everything for another individual, only to be crushed by their own foolishness. Many wars have started over slights or humiliations, and the interests of slighted or humiliated people have taken precedence over the interests of the thousands who have then been sacrificed to avenge the slight.

Foolishness is also reflected in action that represents poor use and balance of the processes of adaptation, shaping of environments, and selection of new environments. Adapting to a tyrannical environment to save oneself can result in foolish decisions, as can placing undue emphasis on shaping one's environment. Additionally, an overreliance on selecting new environments can be foolish because it can make one appear unreliable.

### Developing Wise Thinking

The development of wisdom is critical to the healthy functioning of society. Wisdom is required of leaders, but it is also advisable to plant the seeds of wisdom in children and adolescents, who are future

parents and leaders. Students should learn not only to recall facts and to think critically and creatively about things they learn but also to think wisely about them.

Wisdom is related to values. It is impossible to speak of wisdom outside the context of a set of values, which in combination may lead one to a moral stance or developmental stage. Similarly, practical intelligence is a function of societal or cultural values. Values mediate the balance between interests and responses and collectively contribute to how one defines the common good.

The intersection of wisdom with morality can be seen in the overlap in the notion of wisdom presented here and in the notion of moral reasoning as it applies in the two highest stages of moral development. In the fifth stage, morality is seen as a social contract, decided by group consensus; in the sixth stage, decisions are made on the basis of universal moral imperatives or one's own guiding principles. Wisdom also involves caring for others as well as oneself. At the same time, wisdom is broader than moral reasoning, applying to any problem involving a balance of intrapersonal, interpersonal, and extrapersonal interests, whether or not moral issues are at stake.

### Characteristics of Wise Persons

One of the most important characteristics of wise people is their capacity for *dialogical thinking*, which involves the ability to understand that other people have different perspectives. We are constantly expected to take sides on complex issues that are often presented in either/or terms; however, few issues can be discussed in such terms. Wise people are able to see beyond apparent dichotomies and look for new solutions.

Wise thinkers also use *dialectical thinking*, which involves under-

standing that ideas and paradigms constantly evolve. This kind of thinking entails an attempt to integrate the key elements of seemingly disparate ideas. Wise people understand that most ideas have some worthwhile elements that can be combined with other ideas to form new ideas.

Wise people also recognize that almost everything can be used for better or worse ends. They realize that the ends to which knowledge is put *do* matter, and they are vigilant in attempting to anticipate and clarify potential misinterpretations of their ideas.

### Conclusions

Because we urgently need wise strategies for resolving conflicts and guiding behavior, it is important to nurture morality and wisdom. To nurture morality and wisdom, we must begin with ourselves. Wise thinkers are role models because they practice what they believe. They are open to new ideas and seek to actively synthesize disparate points of view. They look to balance their interests in themselves, others, and institutions in both the short and the long terms. They also attempt to balance the extent to which they adapt to, shape, and select their environments. Our efforts to nurture morality and wisdom must be aimed at all people in all societies. ☞

### Recent LLS Book Release

Wong, K. K., & Wang, M. C. (Eds.). *Efficiency, accountability, and equity in Title I schoolwide program implementation*. Greenwich, CT: Information Age Publishing.



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