

Flourishing in Emerging Adulthood: Positive Development During the Third Decade of Life

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CHAPTER

2 Identity Formation and Moral Development in Emerging Adulthood

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Abstract

We argue in this chapter that moral development and identity formation are not disjunctive topics, and that morality and identity ramify in the personal formation of emerging adults in ways that have dispositional implications for how the rest of their lives go. Moral self-identity is crucial to living a life of purpose and for setting one's life projects on a pathway that contributes to well-being, generativity, and integrity. We first review research on the role of moral purpose in personality development and the conditions that encourage it. We then review the major ways that self-identity has been conceptualized in terms of statuses, processes, and narratives, with particular emphasis on the achievement of identity maturity and its contribution to successful adaptation. We then discuss moral self-identity more directly and outline gaps in the literature and possible lines of future research.

Keywords: moral development, identity formation, emerging adults, moral purpose, moral self-identity, identity, personality development, well-being

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It is not uncommon for individuals to look backward into personal history to discern the events and experiences that seem to have foreshadowed the way one has turned out. The contours of personality, one's range of adaptation to challenge and stress, the entire complex of social-affective characteristics that both individuate and situate us in a sociocultural landscape are presumed to have a deep developmental source that often take us back to the first two decades of life. Certainly the energies of developmental science have prioritized the study of early life, childhood, and adolescence, and for good reason: the sheer extent and pace of developmental change across the first two decades is of unquestioned importance.

Yet there is increasing recognition that the third decade of life is also of crucial significance for understanding successful adaptation across the life course (Lapsley, 2014). Many important developmental acquisitions, such

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as interpersonal understanding and self-understanding, and individuation and identity, are not completely won by the time of emerging adulthood. This transitional phase will pose new challenges, and how well one navigates this terrain will depend critically on the social-cognitive ability to forge new, stable, and workable understandings of self-and-other in a relational world that is increasingly mobile, fleeting, and changeable (Lapsley & Woodbury, 2016). How these challenges are resolved in emerging adulthood will either provide forward-leaning momentum into a life that is fulfilling, unified, and whole, or it will result in one that seems stagnant, fraying, and unfulfilled.

Of course, mere adaptation is not the goal. One hopes to flourish. One hopes to live well the life that is good for one to live. How to live well the life that is good for one to live is a fundamental question that has endured since antiquity. How to live well draws attention to what it means for human nature to flourish, and under what
p. 15 conditions. It ↳ draws attention to what it means to be a person and how the characteristics of personality conduce for achieving objectively desirable ends. The goal of a good life lived well is referred to as *eudaimonia*.

But eudaimonia requires doing well as well as living well. Living a life that is good for one to live raises questions about the ethical dimensions of our aspirations and commitments, about the projects that structure our identity, and about the purposes that animate our ambitions. Moral notions, on this view, go to the heart of what it means to be a person (Carr, 2001). This makes adult development an inherently moral project, and it makes the third decade of life a period of profound moral development.

Hence, morality, personality, and self-identity are inextricably connected issues in emerging adulthood, and how these themes are woven into a coherent self-narrative is arguably the most significant developmental challenge of the third decade (McAdams, 2015). Indeed, there is reason to believe that morality is crucial to our very self-understanding as persons, and that emerging adulthood is a fertile period during which personality organization is open to transformation and reorganization.

Damon and Hart (1982) showed, for example, that within each domain of the "Me Self" (*physical, active, social, psychological*), the highest level of self-understanding (as self-concept) implicates a moral point of view. Moreover, recent research has shown that morality is considered indispensable to selfhood; it is the moral self that is essential to our identity, more so than personality traits, memory, or desires (Strohminger & Nichols, 2014). Moral categories are more chronically accessible than competence traits, and they dominate our impression formation (Wojciszke, Bazinska, & Jaworski, 1998). It is moral character that is most distinctive about identity and what we care most about in others (Goodwin, Piazza, & Rozin, 2014; Brambilla & Leach, 2014).

There is now increasing evidence that early adulthood might also be a fertile period for investigating identity and personality development. Although rank-order stability of personality is remarkably high across the lifespan, Roberts, Walton, and Viechtbauer (2006) showed in a meta-analysis of 92 longitudinal samples that mean-level change in personality is most pronounced in young adulthood, such as increases in conscientiousness, agreeableness, and emotional stability. Indeed, emerging adulthood may be a period of "personality trait moratorium" just as it is an identity moratorium, a time of exploration not just in terms of
p. 16 identity commitments, but in dispositional qualities as well. ↳

But these qualities become consolidated when individuals make the transition to adulthood. "It is during young adulthood when people begin to confront the realities of becoming an adult and when we find significant gains in personality traits" (Roberts et al., 2006, p. 20). The implication is straightforward for researchers interested in the development of moral personality during the third decade of life. We will see this theme again, for example, when we examine narrative approaches to personality and the keenly felt challenge that arises during emerging adulthood to author a life story that makes sense.

In this chapter we take up the topics of moral development and identity formation in emerging adulthood. These are not disjunctive topics. Indeed, morality and identity ramify in the personal formation of emerging

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adults in ways that have dispositional implications for how the rest of their lives go. Moral self-identity is crucial to living a life of purpose and for setting one's life projects on a pathway that contributes to well-being, generativity, and integrity. In the next section we review research on the role of moral purpose in personality development and the conditions that encourage it. We then review the major ways that self-identity has been conceptualized in terms of statuses, processes, and narratives, with particular emphasis on the achievement of identity maturity and its contribution to successful adaptation. We then discuss moral self-identity more directly and outline gaps in the literature and possible lines of future research.

Moral Purpose and Eudaimonia

If emerging adulthood is an unusually fertile period for consolidation of personality traits as young people confront the possibilities and realities of becoming adults, then what moral constructs must be in place to lay the ground plan for eudaimonia? Recently, the notion of purpose has emerged as a candidate moral construct (see Bronk & Baumsteiger, this volume). Ryff (1989a, 1989b) suggested that establishing a purpose in life involves setting goals and identifying a sense of direction for achieving them. A growing body of theoretical and empirical literature suggests that having a purpose in life contributes to optimal human development. For example, purpose is an important feature of resilient youth and is considered a developmental asset for positive
p. 17 youth development (Benson, 2006). Burrow and Hill (2011) showed, for example, ↳ that purpose commitment is associated with positive affect, hope, happiness, and well-being among both adolescents and emerging adults, and that purpose commitment fully mediates the relationship between identity and changes in daily positive and negative affect. In their view, "cultivating a sense of purpose may be an important mechanism through which a stable identity contributes to well-being" (p. 1196).

Of course, purpose can be construed according to any domain or subjective set of criteria (e.g., prosocial, financial, careerist), and it can be noble or ignoble (Damon & Bronk, 2007). William Damon and his colleagues circumscribe the definition of purpose to refer to a stable and generalizable intention to accomplish something that is at once meaningful to the self and leads to productive engagement with some aspect of the world beyond the self (Damon, Menon, & Bronk, 2003). On this definition, purpose requires a focus on an overriding life project that structures one's striving and aspiration ("accomplish something"); it must be deeply rooted in one's self-conception ("meaningful to the self"); and it must be other-directed to effect some good in the world other than mere self-aggrandizement ("productive engagement beyond the self").

One study showed that having an identified purpose is associated with greater life satisfaction across three age groups (adolescence, emerging adulthood, young adulthood), but that searching for purpose was associated with positive outcomes only for adolescents and emerging adults, but not young adults (Bronk, Hill, Lapsley, Talib, & Finch, 2009). In other words, if one is still searching for purpose beyond the "psychosocial moratorium" allotted for identity work, then the arc of one's personality development is not going well. In contrast, searching for purpose is part of the adaptive life task of adolescents and university-age emerging adults, and so underscores the importance of this age period for constructing the personal requirements for eudaimonia.

The personal values and goals that individuals construct during college have been an enduring topic of interest for researchers (e.g., Astin & Nichols, 1964; Astin, Green, Korn, & Schalit, 1986). For many students, the collegiate experience is a transitional period of great personal exploration that brings clarity to goals and values in a way that contributes to identity formation and other developmental markers of positive adaptation (e.g., Brandenberger, 2005).

There are notable recent efforts to explore the contributions of the collegiate experience to the moral formation
p. 18 of emerging adults (e.g., ↳ Colby, Ehrlich, Beaumont, & Stephens, 2003). Brandenberger (1998, 2005) articulated a theoretical framework that outlines the developmental implications of service-learning and

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pedagogies of experience, while an emerging empirical literature examines the potential for volunteer engagement during college to promote personal development and social concern. Engagement during young adulthood, whether through direct volunteer service or service-learning, has been shown to predict identity development (Yates & Youniss, 1996), moral development (Boss, 1994), feelings of personal or political efficacy (Reeb, Katsuyama, Sammon, & Yoder, 1998), and civic responsibility (Ehrlich, 2000).

It is not surprising that service engagement and related pedagogies show a variety of positive outcomes during the college years. Engaged forms of learning provide opportunities for students to explore complex issues directly—with concomitant elements of risk and potential—in a manner consist with their developing abilities. Similarly, engaged learning places students in moral contexts, in a "web of cooperative relationships between citizens" (Brehm & Rahn, 1997, p. 999) where life goals and a sense of purpose may develop. Hence an important moral responsibility of higher education is to cultivate "dialogic competence in public moral language" (Strike, 1996, p. 889), and to provide occasions, in the context of scholarly engagement and intellectual inquiry, where these virtues are on frequent display and avidly practiced.

Of course, purpose-in-life comes in plural forms, and it is important for researchers to identify not only *that* one is invested in a purposeful life or *how much* one is invested, but also the causes from which one's purpose stems. The content of purpose, be it financial, creative, personal recognition, or prosocial, appears to influence the trajectory of well-being, integrity, and a sense of a good life lived well, with prosocial purpose most strongly linked to eudaimonia. This was shown in longitudinal research that tracked individuals 13 years after their university graduation. Although financial, creative, personal recognition, and prosocial purpose orientations were stable over time, only a prosocial purpose orientation was associated with generativity, psychological well-being, and integrity in early middle life (Hill, Burrow, Brandenberger, Lapsley, & Quaranto, 2009; Bowman, Brandenberger, Lapsley, Hill, & Quaranto, 2010; Bowman, Brandenberger, Hill, & Lapsley, 2011).

It would appear, then, that a prosocial moral purpose orientation holds a distinct advantage over other purpose
p. 19 orientations with respect ↳ to successful adaptation in early midlife. Moreover, certain aspects of the collegiate experience appear to canalize this dispositional tendency in a way that maximizes the likelihood of eudaimonia. For example, two separate forms of community engagement during college—time spent volunteering and taking at least one service-learning course—was positively related to well-being 13 years after graduation. These forms of community engagement contributed to future volunteer work and prosocial orientation, both of which are associated with four different types of well-being: personal growth, environmental mastery, purpose in life, and life satisfaction.

Identity and Morality in Emerging Adulthood

When Erikson was writing about the challenges of psychosocial development across the lifespan, it was perhaps to be expected that the eight stages that he described would appear like an epigenetic staircase. Each successive challenge would be encountered just when one was expected to meet it. During adolescence, for example, one was expected to resolve the identity question ("Who am I"?) before meeting the challenge of intimacy in early adulthood. Typically, the identity question was resolved around vocational commitments that made possible a subjectively felt sense of continuity between one's ability, avocation, and skill set with the adult role structure of society. A clearly articulated and convincing set of identity commitments made it possible to enter into the sort of authentic intimate relationship that does not smother or absorb selfhood, but instead allows one to confidently give something away to the coupleship without feeling depleted or enmeshed by it. The normative sequence, in short, was to develop identity, find work, and then marry.

Yet this sequence is hardly normative for an increasing number of young people in the present generation. The third decade of life finds many young people extending their education and dependency, and struggling find a place in a fast-changing technological and service economy. Many delay marriage until their mid- or late

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twenties or beyond. The very notion of "emerging adulthood" now commonplace (and controversial) in developmental science is testimony to the greatly altered circumstances of coming-of-age (Lapsley, 2014). One consequence is that the stages of psychosocial development are no longer affixed to a stepladder or staircase.
p. 20 Many young people, indeed, find it necessary ↳ to work on identity and intimacy simultaneously as overlapping projects rather than as psychosocial challenges encountered sequentially. The psychosocial tasks of adolescence (identity) and young adulthood (intimacy) are now conjoined in emerging adulthood, a condition that elevates the risk that pseudo-intimacy will be taken to the altar if identity questions are not answered with sufficient firmness and clarity before vows are exchanged.

Identity and intimacy, then, are developmentally linked psychosocial challenges of the third decade of life. But identity development is also a project of moral formation. It is a project of figuring out what one's life is for, of determining which pattern of personal identifications is best suited to build a life of purpose and meaning. Indeed, Erikson (1968, p. 39) argued that an ethical capacity is the "true criterion of identity," and that "identity and fidelity are necessary for ethical strength" (Erikson, 1963, p. 126). This suggests that moral identity is the clear goal of both moral and identity development, and that the two developmental tracks are ideally conjoined in adult personality. Of course, a construct so richly variegated as identity will be studied in a variety of ways.

Identity Status Paradigm

The identity status paradigm is a venerable way to study identity in adolescence and emerging adulthood (Schwartz, Zamboanga, Luyckx, Meca, & Ritchie, 2016). James Marcia distilled from Erikson's writings two fundamental identity processes: exploration and commitment (Kroger & Marcia, 2011). Exploration was likened to Erikson's notion of "identity crisis" and entails searching for and experimenting with various identity alternatives (e.g., political ideals, religious beliefs, career choices). Commitment involves choosing and investing in particular identity options (e.g., subscribing to certain political ideals or religious beliefs, or moving toward certain career choices). Consideration of the relative depth of exploration and commitment in any particular individual yields four possible identity statuses: diffusion, foreclosure, moratorium, and achievement. Those in diffusion have neither explored identity options nor made commitments; those in foreclosure have made commitments without exploring options (e.g., mindlessly taking on parental religious
p. 21 beliefs); those ↳ in moratorium are actively exploring but have not yet made commitments; and those in achievement have made commitments after a period of exploration.

Marcia's status paradigm is not a developmental model, but it can be used to examine age trends in statuses (Kroger & Marcia, 2011). Scholars have hypothesized that, based on Erikson's and Marcia's ideas, progressive developmental status transitions (e.g., diffusion to foreclosure, diffusion to moratorium, foreclosure to moratorium, and moratorium to achievement) should be more prevalent than regressive ones (i.e., the inverse of those just listed). A meta-analysis of 72 studies found support for the predominance of these progressive developmental patterns of identity status change among longitudinal studies, although there was also marked stability as well as some regression (Kroger, Martinussen, & Marcia, 2010).

In terms of age trends, the same meta-analysis found that the proportion of people in identity achievement increases through emerging adulthood (from about a quarter of emerging adults being identity-achieved in their early twenties to about half by the late thirties), while moratorium rates peak at age 19 and then decline. They also found that trends in diffusion and foreclosure are unclear during early emerging adulthood, but prevalence starts dropping steadily by the mid-twenties. Lastly, cross-sectional studies that used continuous scores for each status, rather than classifying individuals into statuses, found that diffusion and foreclosure scores decreased across age groups, while moratorium and achievement scores increased.

Another recent review of longitudinal studies echoed the patterns noted in the meta-analysis, but also pointed out that in addition to progressive mean-level changes (e.g., decreasing diffusion and increasing achievement),

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there is also at least a moderate amount of rank-order stability (Meeus, 2011), and this stability increases over time. Hence change in identity status during emerging adulthood is marked both by significant mean-level change in the direction of identity achievement, but also significant rank-order stability—a pattern that holds true for personality development more generally. What's more, there is evidence that identity status is related to moral reasoning. A recent meta-analysis of 10 studies showed, for example, that there is an association between identity exploration, identity achievement, and Kohlberg's account of postconventional moral
p. 22 reasoning (Jespersen, Kroger, & Martinussen, 2013). ↳

A Dimensional Approach to Moral Identity

Recently, several researchers proposed a process-oriented approach to studying identity that involves dimensions rather than statuses (Luyckx, Goossens, & Soenens, 2006; Luyckx, Schwartz, Goossens, Beyers, & Missotten, 2011). This model involves four identity dimensions: exploration in depth, commitment making, exploration in breadth, and identification with commitments. There are two processes involved. First is commitment formation, where people explore their identity options broadly (exploration in depth), and make an initial commitment (commitment making). The second process is commitment evaluation, where people explore their existing commitments in depth (exploration in depth), and then decide whether or not to further identify with those commitments (identification with commitment).

Luyckx and colleagues use as an example a girl choosing a college major. She will initially explore a wide range of options for a major, researching the different possibilities that look appealing to her (exploration in breadth). Eventually she will choose one specific major to pursue (commitment making). As she starts taking courses and learning even more about the major, she will be able to further evaluate her choice of major (exploration in depth). This can lead to a stronger conviction that she made the correct choice of majors (identification with commitment). However, the process is dynamic, as she may change her mind and decide to start exploring other options more broadly again.

Longitudinal studies of these identity dimensions reveal interesting developmental trends (Luyckx et al., 2011). By emerging adulthood, most people are actively engaged in these processes. Change is gradual but fluctuates somewhat dynamically. On average, though, there are linear increases in commitment making and exploration in depth. Exploration in breadth increases linearly but also has a negative quadratic slope, suggesting a leveling off over time. Identification with commitment decreased linearly with a positively quadratic slope, also suggesting a leveling off with development. In contrast, cross-sectional age comparisons have found that, across adolescence and emerging adulthood, the two commitment processes increase linearly while the two exploration process follow a quadratic trend of increasing until about the early twenties and then decreasing. Taken together, in line with the identity status research, the trends over time suggest developmental progression in identity formation across adolescence and emerging adulthood (McAdams, 2009). To date the
p. 23 dimension ↳ approach to studying identity has not taken up an investigation of the moral dimensions of identity development in emerging adulthood. One exception, which will be discussed in more detail below, is that commitment making is more strongly linked to adaptive outcomes in emerging adulthood when people have a greater sense of moral identity (i.e., it is important for them to be a moral person; Hardy et al., 2013).

Narrative Identity

The principle challenge of personality development during emerging and young adulthood is the construction of a narrative identity (McAdams, 2016). Narrative identity is an evolving story of the self that brings order and sensibility to one's lived experience (McAdams & McLean, 2013), including the integration of self-distinctiveness with relational commitments (McLean, Breen, & Fournier, 2010). It attempts to reconcile the scenes, characters, and events of one's past with imagined prospects of the self in the future, and in a way that brings a sense of unity, purpose, and meaning to one's life.

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The very construction of stories creates our sense of selfhood (McLean, Pasupathi, & Pals, 2007). We want the plot lines of our life story to cohere. We want the narrative arc of our story to make sense to ourselves and to others, even if it means that our take on the storyline is not entirely objective or even accurate. We make it fit. We fashion the narrative in a way that makes desirable outcomes seem inevitable, as if the way our life is turning out is itself the product of a coming of age that seems inexorable. And when we are confronted with moral failure, we construct a narrative to make sense of our moral agency, forcing us to come to grips with the sort of person we claim ourselves to be, and inducing, as one result, a more charitable and forgiving outlook on others (Pasupathi & Wainryb, 2010).

Authoring the life narrative takes on a certain urgency during emerging adulthood given the many transitions and life-changing events that occur during this period, such as graduating from college, starting a career, getting married, and having children (McAdams, 2011)—and given the fact that the capacity for constructing a personal life story is well in place by emerging adulthood (Habermas & Bluck, 2000). Hence the self-as-author is the dominant metaphor of personality development during emerging adulthood; life authorship the
p. 24 dominant developmental task (McAdams, 2013). ↳

Life-story narratives tend to show substantial continuity over the course of emerging adulthood, but there is change as well. For example, older emerging adults report more emotionally positive stories, as well as more stories marked by emotional nuance, self-differentiation, and self-reflection, than do younger emerging adults (McAdams et al., 2006). Moreover, identity narratives are refractive of lived experience. For example, themes of self-transcendence show up in the narratives of emerging adults who undertake service obligations (Cox & McAdams, 2012). In one study, emerging adults who were considered moral exemplars told life-story narratives that were more often characterized by agency themes, ideological depth, contamination sequences, redemptive experiences, and awareness of others' suffering than were the narratives of matched controls (Matsuba & Walker, 2005).

Pratt, Arnold, and Lawford (2009) examined narratives of moral experience in the life story as a way of assessing how moral identity takes shape in emerging adulthood. In one study, a large sample of Canadian youth were administered measures of personality and generativity at ages 19, 23, and 26. At age 26, participants were asked to generate five stories of moral issues from their lives: an ambiguous situation that posed a moral dilemma, a story of moral goodness or success, one of moral weakness or failure, one that involved moral courage, and another of moral cowardice. The stories were rated in terms of the salience of moral identity, defined as the concern evinced in the stories to the needs or rights of others, and often at a cost to the self. The authors believed that these five stories provide a useful first start to mapping the narrative terrain of moral identity in emerging adulthood. Perhaps not surprisingly, participants found it easier to generate stories about instances of moral ambiguity and courage than moral failure.

Narrative moral identity was positively correlated with benevolence-universalism values at ages 19 and 23, with community involvement at ages 17 and 26, and with generativity concerns at ages 23 and 26. Global ratings of moral identity were particularly associated with telling a story about moral goodness and about moral courage. Indeed, individuals higher in generativity at age 26 were particularly likely to tell moral courage stories. These data showed that narratives reflective of moral identity are moderately associated with moral motivation and prosocial behavior in emerging adulthood.

In a second longitudinal study, Pratt et al. (2009) collected interview and questionnaire data from youth at ages
p. 25 16, 20, and 24 to determine the link between early moral narrative identity and generativity ↳ development in emerging adulthood. The prompts for the story narratives were not specifically moral in nature (as in the first study). Here, adolescents were asked to relate a story about a turning point, a situation of moral uncertainty, a time when they were taught a value by a parent, and a time when they were proud of themselves. The results showed that moral identity ratings at age 16 were correlated with community involvement, and at age 24 with generative concerns. Moral identity ratings at age 20 were associated with community involvement, and at age

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24 with generative concerns and generative story themes. Hence, narrative moral identity at age 16 and age 20 predicted later youth involvement in the community and generative concerns in emerging adulthood.

Identity Maturity and Identity Content

Much of the work on identity has focused on identity maturity, but there is another facet of identity that is equally important—that of what a person bases his or her identity on (Blasi, 2004). People can base their identity on a wide variety of issues, such as physical characteristics, personality traits, behaviors, roles and relationships, attitudes and preferences, values and goals, or beliefs and ideologies. Some such "identity contents" might be more adaptive than others (Hardy & Carlo, 2011). For example, some might be more "personally expressive" of who we are, and thus more conducive to flourishing and self-actualization (Waterman, 1993). In line with this, it has been suggested, based on self-determination theory, that identity commitments which are in line with our intrinsic motivations are more likely to fulfill innate psychological needs and motivate value-congruent behaviors (Soenens, Berzonsky, Dunkel, Papini, & Vansteenkiste, 2011). Further, the specific contents of our various possible selves (e.g., ideal/desires and feared/dreaded) have important motivational implications, as people try to approach their ideal/desired self and avoid their feared/dreaded self (Oyserman & James, 2011).

This interaction between identity maturity and content has been demonstrated to be relevant to moral personality in emerging adulthood. First, as reviewed above, research on narrative identity has found that the moral content of narratives is predictive of prosocial engagement over time (Pratt et al., 2009). Additionally, as
p. 26 noted earlier regarding the dimensional approach to identity formation, identity maturity ↳ and moral identity content (i.e., the extent to which people based their identity on moral issues, such as being a moral person) interact in predicting emerging adult mental health, health risk behaviors, and psychological well-being (Hardy et al., 2013).

These interactions can be interpreted in two ways. Put one way, identity formation is more predictive of outcomes at higher levels of moral identity. In other words, having a mature identity will matter more for one's health to the extent that one bases one's identity on being a moral person. From a different interpretation, moral identity is more predictive of outcomes at higher levels of identity formation. In other words, moral identity contents will have stronger claims on peoples' actions when they are a central part of a mature identity (Hardy & Carlo, 2011). Either way, emerging adults who have a mature identity and center their identity on being a moral person are more likely to be healthy and well.

Moral Self-Identity

We noted earlier that personality, morality, and self-identity are inextricably connected in emerging adulthood. These themes come together in recent social-cognitive accounts of moral personality that attempt to capture the dispositional, motivational, and contextual features of moral behavior by reference to moral self-identity (Aquino & Read, 2002; Hardy & Carlo, 2005; Lapsley & Narvaez, 2004). The moral self-identity construct has philosophical sources in attempts to link personhood to second-order desires (Frankfurt, 1971, 1988) and strong evaluation (Taylor, 1989), as well as psychological sources in Blasi's (1984) account of the moral self.

On Frankfurt's account, a person (as opposed to a *wanton*) is someone who cares about the sort of desires one has, who reflects upon desires and motives and forms judgments with respect to them. A person wills that second-order desires be carried "*all the way to action*" (Frankfurt, 1971, p. 8). A moral person, on this account, is one who cares about morality as a second-order desire, and whose behavior is motivated accordingly (as *second-order volitions*). In contrast a wanton does not care about his desires or his will. As Frankfurt (1971) put

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it, “Not only does he pursue whatever course of action he is most strongly inclined to pursue, but he does not
p. 27 care which of his inclinations is the strongest” (p. 11). ↳

Taylor’s (1989) account of strong evaluation draws a more explicit connection between second-order desires and morality. He argued, for example, that “being a self is inseparable from existing in a space of moral issues” (p. 112). On this view, identity is the product of strong evaluation; it is defined by reference to things that have significance for us. Strong evaluators make ethical assessments of first-order desires (following Frankfurt). They make discriminations about what is worthy or unworthy, higher or lower, better or worse; and these discriminations are made against a “horizon of significance” that frames and constitutes who we are as persons. “To know who I am,” Taylor (1989) writes, “is a species of knowing where I stand” (p. 27). He continues: “My identity is defined by the commitments and identifications which provide the frame or horizon within which I can try to determine from case to case what is good or valuable, or what ought to be done or what I endorse or oppose” (p. 27).

The notion that personhood hinges on the importance of what we care about (Frankfurt) and by reference to things that have significance for us (Taylor) had an outsized influence on moral development theory. It greatly influenced, for example, Augusto Blasi’s writings on moral self-identity. Blasi (1984) was concerned to render a better account of the relationship between moral judgment and moral action. He argued that a person is more likely to follow through with what moral duty requires to the extent that one identifies with morality and cares about it as a second-order desire. In Blasi’s view, the moral person constructs self-identity around a commitment to morality. One has a moral identity to the extent that moral notions—such as being good, being just, compassionate, or fair—are judged to be central, essential, and important to one’s self-understanding. Further, moral identity is when moral claims stake out the very terms of reference for the sort of person one claims to be. And failing to act in a way consistent with what is central, essential, and important to (moral) identity is to risk self-betrayal; it is this desire for self-consistency that serves as the motivation for moral behavior, for following through on what one knows to be required by moral commitments (Hardy & Carlo, 2005).

Presumably, there are individual differences in the degree to which individuals align the self with morality; there are individual differences in what people care about. For some individuals, moral considerations rarely penetrate their understanding of who they are as persons, nor do they influence their outlook on important
p. 28 issues, nor do they “come to mind” when faced with the innumerable transactions of daily life. ↳ Some choose to define the self by reference to other priorities, some incorporate morality into their personality in different degrees, and some emphasize some moral considerations (“justice”) but not others (“caring”).

Blasi’s seminal writings generated much interest in the moral dimensions of personality (Lapsley & Narvaez, 2004), although they also attracted critics. Some noted that Blasian moral identity is limited only to moral behavior that is the product of effortful deliberation and explicit invocation of the moral law and so misses everyday morality that is driven by tacit or automatic processes (Shao, Aquino, & Freeman, 2008). The theory also fails to specify just when moral identity is evinced, and under what conditions (Nucci, 2004). Indeed, moral self-identity is assumed, on the standard account, to be an adhesive personal quality that carries strong evaluation and second-order volitions across contexts as if impervious to situational complexity (Leavitt, Zhu, & Aquino, 2016; Jennings, Mitchell, & Hannah, 2015). That moral self-identity is a dimension of individual differences collides with the claim that everybody thinks morality is important (Nucci, 2004), that it is essential to person perception (Goodwin et al., 2014) and it is essential to our identity as persons (Strohminger & Nichols, 2014).

Yet a social-cognitive approach to moral self-identity addresses these concerns, and in a way that retains three core features of Blasi’s theory: it affirms that morality is central to the identity of at least some (if not most) individuals, it is strongly cognitivist but acknowledges that not all morally significant cognitive activity is explicitly deliberative, and it claims that moral self-identity is a dimension of individual differences. Moral

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centrality, cognition, and individual differences, then, must be part of any robust conception of moral identity, but these features must also be reconciled with evidence of situational variability (Lapsley, 2016).

The application of social-cognitive theory to the moral domain is straightforward (Aquino & Reed, 2002; Lapsley & Narvaez, 2004). Lapsley and Narvaez (2004) argued, for example, that moral personality is best understood in terms of the chronic accessibility of morally relevant schemas for construing social events. A moral person, on this account, is one for whom moral constructs are chronically accessible and easily activated by contextual primes. If having a moral identity is just when moral notions are central, important, and essential to one's self-understanding (following Blasi, 1984), then notions that are central, important, and
p. 29 essential should also be those that are chronically ↳ accessible for appraising the social landscape. Highly accessible moral schemas provide a dispositional readiness to discern the moral dimensions of experience, as well as to underwrite the discriminative facility in selecting situationally appropriate behavior. Hence the accessibility and chronicity of moral schemes are the cognitive carriers of moral dispositions (Lapsley & Lasky, 2001).

Karl Aquino and his colleagues improved this account by noting that moral identity competes with other identities that constitute the self-system (Aquino & Reed, 2002; Aquino, Freeman, Reed, Lim, & Felps, 2009). The moral self-system is heterogeneous and interacts dynamically with contexts. The self-concept is a network of identity schemes, but not all of them can be active at any one time, given the limitations of working memory. Whether any of them are influential is partly a function of how trait accessibility interacts with situational cues. Situational cues can activate or deactivate the accessibility of moral identity, or they can activate some other identity at odds with morality. Hence situations are crucial to any social-cognitive theory of virtue. A situation that primes or activates the accessibility of moral identity strengthens the motivation to act morally. Situational factors that decrease accessibility weaken moral motivation.

An impressive empirical record documents the central claims of moral self-identity theory (Lapsley, 2016; Jennings, Mitchell, & Hannah, 2005). For example, individuals with a highly central moral identity report a stronger obligation to help and share resources with out-groups (Reed, Aquino, & Levy, 2007) and include more people in their circle of moral regard (Reed & Aquino, 2003). Individuals with a strong moral identity are more empathic (Detert, Trevino, & Sweitzer, 2008), are more likely to have a principled (vs. expedient) ethical ideology (McFerran, Aquino, & Duffy 2010), show greater moral attentiveness (Reynolds, 2008) and moral elevation (Aquino, McFerran, & Laven, 2011), and are less aggressive (Barriga, Morrison, Liau, & Gibbs, 2001) and less likely to engage in organizational deviance (Greenbaum, Mawritz, Mayer, & Priesemuth, 2013) and unethical behavior at work (May, Chang, & Shao, 2015).

In addition, individuals with a strongly central moral identity are less likely to adopt moral disengagement strategies (Detert et al., 2008), derogate outgroups (Smith, Aquino, Koleva, & Graham, 2014), or otherwise resort to cognitive rationalizations that justify visiting harm upon others (Aquino, Reed, Thau, & Freeman,
p. 30 2007). Moral identity predicts health outcomes and psychological well-being (Hardy et al., 2013). ↳ Moreover, moral identity can be activated by subtle contextual cues even outside of conscious awareness (Leavitt et al., 2016), and otherwise moderate the influence of situation primes (Aquino et al., 2009).

The social-cognitive moral identity research program has several salutary features. It is theoretically integrative with other areas of psychological science (e.g., spreading activation theories of memory, cognitive science models of information processing, and social-cognitive theories of personality). It rests on an impressive and growing empirical foundation. It justifies the original Blasian expectation that moral self-identity would be a robust predictor of moral behavior. Indeed, no other dispositional account of moral personality comes remotely close. It makes bold claims about the work of moral identity as a mediator and moderator, with ample and interesting empirical corroboration. Hence moral self-identity constitutes a robust, progressive research program that will continue to drive novel, innovate questions concerning what it means to flourish in the third decade of life and beyond (Lapsley, 2016).

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Future Directions

The literatures on identity formation and moral development are rich in theory and have generated a substantial amount of empirical research. As we have seen, research at the intersection of the two constructs (i.e., moral identity) is yielding highly promising lines of research. Yet there remain substantial gaps in the literature. There are still questions concerning the developmental trajectory of moral identity (Krettenauer & Hertz, 2015). Additional research on the dispositional features of moral identity is required, as is research on its role in moderating or mediating behavior across a full range of experiences in context.

One way to move forward in this effort is to be more integrative in our thinking. There is research on moral identity across multiple disciplines, including psychology (Hardy & Carlo, 2011), neuroscience (Moll, de Oliveira-Souza, & Zahn, 2009), business (Shao et al., 2008), sociology (Stets & Carter, 2006), political science (Monroe, 2001), anthropology (Cassaniti & Hickman, 2014), and philosophy (Taylor, 1989). However, most scholarship in these disciplines is fairly insular. Thus, cross-pollination of ideas may more efficiently and
p. 31 effectively generate innovations in theoretical work on moral identity. ↳

Additionally, there are a number of critical questions regarding moral identity that remain relatively unexamined. First, how might moral identity best be conceptualized and measured? In other words, what is moral identity and how should we study it? Although various approaches to conceptualization and measurement have found their way into the literature (for a review, see Hardy & Carlo, 2011), little has been done to compare and contrast them. For instance, we do not know how the existing conceptualizations of moral identity compare in terms of descriptive, explanatory, predictive, or operative power (which is considered criteria for evaluating the strength of theories). Moreover, the relative utility of different measurement strategies is unknown. As an exception, one recent study provides data on several common self-report measures of moral identity (Hardy, Bean, & Olsen, 2015).

Second, how does moral identity develop? Some have argued that the process involves the merging of moral and identity development, rather than a unique developmental system (e.g., Bergman, 2004). Or it may be that morality and identity are two facets of the same developmental system (Davidson & Youniss, 1991). Either way, moral identity seems to be the developmental goal of both moral and identity development, which is likely unrealized until at least emerging adulthood (Moshman, 2011). Unfortunately, at this point we know of no studies that have directly examined these developmental processes. Although studies of moral identity have involved adolescents or adults, few have spanned across the age periods. In fact, to our knowledge, only two studies of moral identity have involved longitudinal data (Krettenauer, 2011; Pratt, Hunsberger, Pancer, & Alisat, 2003). Further, specific to emerging adulthood, although many of the moral identity studies have involved college student samples, few have done so with a developmental focus (Padilla-Walker, 2016). Thus, longitudinal studies are needed, examining developmental processes of moral identity, spanning at least the adolescent and emerging adulthood years.

Third, what is the role of important life transitions and salient life events? Most research on moral development, including that on moral identity specifically, has focused on linear and normative developmental changes. Thus, we know little about nonlinear changes that might happen as a result of life transitions (e.g., getting married or having children) or salient life events (e.g., graduating from college or the death of a loved one). Such transitions or events, many of which occur during emerging adulthood, may lead to marked
p. 32 transformations in moral identity (Gibbs, 2013; Skalski & Hardy, 2013). These transitions ↳ and events might ideally be studied using longitudinal mixed-methods design to fully capture the depth of transformation.

Fourth, how stable is moral identity? In other words, to what extent is it trait-like and relatively stable across situations? Social-cognitive approaches to moral personality highlight the situational nature of moral identity (Lapsley & Narvaez, 2004). In line with this, there is ample evidence that moral identity can be manipulated (e.g., activated) in experimental settings (Monin & Jordan, 2009; Narvaez, Lapsley, Hagele, & Lasky, 2006; Shao

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et al., 2008). Nevertheless, it is unclear to what extent moral identity is stable throughout daily life (i.e., outside of the laboratory setting). This requires the use of experience sampling methods to obtain numerous occasions of data close together in time (e.g., at least daily). We know of no such studies on moral identity, although the methods have been used to capture intra-individual variability in other aspects of morality (Hardy, Zhang, Skalski, Melling, & Brinton, 2014).

Lastly, how does moral identity vary across cultures? The majority of studies on moral identity have involved samples from the United States or Canada, with only a few studies in Eastern cultures (Tu, Lu, & Yu, 2016). No study that we know of has explicitly examined cross-cultural differences in moral identity. Therefore, research is needed looking at how moral identity might be conceptualized and experienced in different cultures, how moral identity development might vary cross-culturally, and how the role of moral identity in motivating behavior might be culture-specific. There is certainly reason to believe that such aspects of personality development and functioning might differ cross-culturally (Heine & Buchtel, 2009).

The developmental opportunities and challenges of the third decade of life are coming into clearer focus. In this chapter we argued that nothing less than our moral status as persons is at stake as emerging adults navigate a range of transitions, relationships, and settings. Answering the great identity question will involve confronting the sort of life that is good for one to live. It will involve coming to grips with the sort of person one claims oneself to be. We argued that morality and identity are ideally conjoined developmental considerations in the third decade, and that identifying the self with morality, building self-understanding around moral ideals and commitments, is one way forward toward a life of well-being and flourishing characteristic of eudaimonia.

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