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Moral identity

Johannes Boegershausen¹, Karl Aquino¹ and Americus Reed II²

Moral identity captures whether the moral self-schema is central to an individual's self-definition. One influential model of moral identity (Aquino and Reed, 2002) suggests that two dimensions of moral identity — internalization and symbolization — predict moral outcomes. It is less clear when and how these two dimensions interact with situational cues. We review empirical studies using the two-dimensional framework and find that the type of moral outcomes being studied (i.e., prescriptive versus proscriptive) influences which dimension of moral identity matters most. Our review shows that moral identity internalization is more crucial than symbolization in interacting with situational cues for outcomes requiring prescriptive moral self-regulation, whereas the moral identity internalization and symbolization are equally important in their interaction with situational cues for outcomes requiring proscriptive moral self-regulation.

Addresses

¹ Marketing and Behavioural Science Division, Sauder School of Business, University of British Columbia, Vancouver BC V6T 1Z2, Canada

² Wharton School, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA 19104, United States

Corresponding authors: Boegershausen, Johannes (johannes.boegershausen@sauder.ubc.ca), Aquino, Karl (karl.aquino@sauder.ubc.ca)

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A social-cognitive perspective of moral identity

A growing body of research explores the role that the 'moral self' [1*] plays in moral functioning, i.e., engaging in moral/prosocial behaviors such as charitable giving and refraining from immoral/anti-social behaviors like mistreatment. Researchers have taken different approaches to answering this question. Some have adopted a largely person-centered approach emphasizing the stability of the moral self over time and how its influence on moral outcomes shows cross-situational consistency [2–5]. Others have advocated a more situation-based approach by highlighting how contextual cues may overpower the

moral self [6,7]. In this paper, we present the case for why an integrative approach based on the principles of social-cognitive theory [8] can reconcile these perspectives. A social-cognitive model can help explain seemingly inconsistent findings in the literature, such as research showing that moral primes lead to moral behavior in one case [9**], but immoral behavior in another [10].

A core principle of the social-cognitive model is that situational cues (e.g., seeing an American flag) have the power to momentarily influence social information processing by activating or deactivating certain knowledge structures (e.g., one's national identity), or schemas, in an individual's working self-concept. However, this model also assumes that some schemas tend to be more readily available for such processing than others [8]. These two facets of schemas account for both the intra-individual stability and coherence of an individual's moral character as well as the variability of moral behavior across situations [11*]. Researchers have used the term *moral identity* to refer to whether the moral self-schema is central to a person's self-definition [12,13]. Our review focuses on contemporary research examining the role of moral identity based on a model proposed by Aquino and Reed (A&R; [14]).

Adopting a social-cognitive conception, A&R conceptualize moral identity as a network of moral trait associations that collectively define a person's moral character. This schema is more easily accessible in working memory for some persons than others, which accounts for the stability of moral identity as an individual difference. Moral identity comprises two dimensions — *internalization* and *symbolization* — corresponding to the private and public aspects of self, respectively. Internalization captures the chronic accessibility of a person's moral self-schema and is therefore indicative of the chronic, subjective experience of having a moral identity [9**,15,16,17*]. The symbolization dimension captures the importance a person places on exhibiting a public moral self as a way of affirming one's morality [18,19]. This dimension of moral identity is therefore at least partly driven by impression management and/or self-verification motives [20].

The central contribution of our review is to show how examining differences in the *type* of moral outcomes being studied reveals systematic patterns in the empirical findings about how the private and public components of moral identity interact with situational factors to predict moral outcomes (i.e., behaviors, intentions, and cognitions that show 'social responsiveness to the needs and interests of others' [9**, p. 124]). Our review of the

empirical literature that has used A&R's framework suggests that whether a moral outcome requires prescriptive (i.e., committing good deeds) versus proscriptive (i.e., refraining from bad deeds) self-regulation [21] appears to partially explain which facet of moral identity is a more reliable predictor of moral outcomes. Our review also presents suggestive evidence that certain kinds of people respond more readily to the 'tolling of situational bells.'

Research on moral identity using A&R's model provides ample evidence of its predictive validity [17^{*}]. Across studies, though, the internalization dimension appears to be a more reliable predictor than the symbolization dimension for a host of moral outcomes such as intentions to volunteer and actual volunteerism (for earlier reviews cf. [1^{*},22,23]), expanding feelings of obligation to show concern for socially distant others (i.e., a wider circle of moral regard) [17^{*}], and refraining from moral disengagement [24,25].

However, if we look beyond main effects and consider how situational contingencies qualify these relationships, a more nuanced picture emerges on the interplay between the two components of moral identity and situational factors. We review 32 empirical papers published in social, consumer, and organizational psychology since the work by A&R first appeared. We include studies that explicitly examine the interaction of moral dispositions (i.e., moral identity internalization and symbolization) and different situational cues on moral/immoral outcomes. We organize our review around the distinction between outcomes that require proscriptive versus those that require prescriptive moral self-regulation [11^{*}]. *Proscriptive moral regulation* involves the performance of 'good deeds' that help others via lessening their suffering or improving their welfare. Prescriptive moral behaviors studied in the literature include charitable giving and helping behaviors. For prescriptive outcomes, it is immoral not to enact good deeds when one has the possibility to do so. In contrast, *proscriptive moral regulation* focuses on inhibiting motivations to commit harmful or immoral acts. Typical examples of prescriptive moral behaviors like cheating or interpersonal mistreatment may physically harm others, violate their trust, or disrespect valued group norms. Immorality within the realm of proscriptive morality corresponds to committing such acts.

Prescriptive moral regulation

Studies of charitable giving show that high moral identity internalizers feel a stronger sense of obligation to show moral concern about socially distant others than low internalizers, which increases their giving of both time and money to out-groups, but not in-groups [24]. However, these effects may emerge only for those with a feminine gender identity [26]. When facing a choice between different means of acting charitably, high internalizers tend to prefer giving time to giving money, because of time's greater self-expressive potential [27].

When regulating prescriptive moral behavior, unambiguous, strong, situational cues that make morality salient (e.g., recalling the Ten Commandments or an ethical organizational climate) are particularly effective at motivating people low in moral identity internalization to act morally [9^{**},28]. Those who only weakly internalize moral identity and place a high importance on symbolic demonstrations of their morality to others (i.e., are high symbolizers) are also motivated by situational cues (such as recognition) that emphasize the reputational gains from engagement in good deeds [18,19]. However, when situational cues, such as witnessing others exhibiting acts of uncommon goodness, require more elaborate processing and moral awareness they appear to motivate moral behavior among high rather than low moral identity internalizers because the former assign greater personal relevance to such acts [29]. Similarly, high (but not low) internalizers are particularly susceptible to *threats* to their moral self-regard posed by situational factors [30] or by their own prior unethical deeds [31]. High internalizers are more likely to engage in compensatory prescriptive moral [31] as well as other forms of behaviors aimed at reasserting their moral self-image (e.g., holding more self-flattering meta-perceptions [30]). Being high in moral identity internalization has also been shown to neutralize the effect of individual predispositions (e.g., the endorsement of a binding rather than an individualizing moral foundation) that might otherwise discourage people from helping out-group members [32].

High moral identity internalizers are also particularly sensitive to moral cues in environments where morality is peripheral. For example, in the context of job search and employee behavior, moral identity internalization amplifies the impact of corporate social responsibility (a firm strategy with explicit moral relevance) on an individual's propensity to engage with and contribute to that corporation [33]. Importantly, while high internalizers are more likely to engage in prescriptive moral behavior, they can be more skeptical and critical when evaluating potential beneficiaries of their good deeds. In fact, high internalizers are less charitable (than low internalizers) when beneficiaries are responsible for the own plight [34^{*}] or when a charity's positioning is misaligned with their political identity [35].

On the basis of our review of studies that focused on prescriptive moral regulation, we propose the *internalization primacy principle* (IPP). The first part of this principle states that moral identity internalization has a stronger impact than symbolization on individuals' reactions to cues in their social environment when they contemplate engaging in prescriptive moral behaviors. Internalization rather than symbolization also shapes individual's susceptibility to threats to their moral credentials and their attentiveness to information about the beneficiaries of their good deeds. The second part of the IPP is that moral

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