The Development of the Moral Self
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In this paper, I will review some of our (Ann Power, Vladimir Khmelkov, Kathleen Roney, and Nicole LaVoi) research on the development of a moral self. We base our approach to the moral self on Blasi's (1993) pioneering research on the development of moral responsibility and identity. I address two issues: 1) how does the sense of self as a moral self arise in the course of moral development? and 2) how does the moral self influence civic engagement?   In responding to the first question, I will discuss the results of a study done with a middle school population. In responding to the second, I will discuss the results of a study of college students.

Drawing on his own studies and that of Nunner-Winkler and Sodian (1988), Blasi (1988; 2005) argues that the linkage between moral understanding and the self is forged sometime around age 12. He observes that, while young children understand that some actions are right and wrong, they do not experience a sense of personal responsibility to act on their moral understanding. Moreover, their moral transgressions do not appear to evoke a deeply felt sense of guilt and shame. It appears that during the middle school years children develop the capacity to integrate their sense of self with their moral understanding such that their sense of self functions as a means of moral motivation. In other words, children develop an efficacious moral self in the middle school years leading to adolescence.

It is possible, of course, that children may not place moral concerns at the core of their self-concept. Arnold (1993) found that only about half of the adolescents in her sample described themselves as having moral characteristics. Using a somewhat different methodology, we are also finding a significant number of children and adolescents fail to describe themselves using moral characteristics. In contrast to Arnold (1993) and Blasi (1993) studies that focus on descriptions of the real or actual self, we ask the participants in our studies to describe their ideal self (the kind of person they would like to become) and their dreaded self (the self they fear becoming). Descriptions of the ideal self give us some indication of the values that frame individuals' orientation to the future. Research with college students (Power, Power, & LaVoi 2005) shows that students who include moral values in their descriptions of their ideal selves are significantly more engaged in civic activities than those who do not include moral values. Although values appear to influence aspirations, they may also influence fears. Perhaps the fear of becoming the self that one dreads helps to keep young adolescents focused on their goals.

Levels of Self-Understanding

In previous studies (Power, Khmelkov, & Power, 1995; Power & Khmelkov, 1997), with a sample of children and adolescents from grades 1 through 10 (ages 7 through 16), we found that the Ideal, Dreaded, and Real Selves develop in a sequential pattern of cognitive levels with similarities to the moral judgment stages (Colby & Kohlberg, 1987), ego development stages (Loevinger, 1976), faith stages (Fowler, 1981), and self-understanding levels (Damon& Hart, 1988). The specifically moral characteristics of the first four levels are described below.

Level 1. Individuals describe their Ideal, Real, and Dreaded Selves with stereotypic labels, such as "nice," "good," or "bad." Often their descriptions of their Ideal and Dreaded Selves reflect either explicitly or implicitly parental commands and admonitions.

Level 2. Individuals describe their Ideal and Real Selves in terms of dispositions for action or as behavioral habits. In describing moral attributes, individuals often mention helpfulness or kindness, understood as meeting the concrete needs or interests of others. Ideals are sometimes justified in terms of their instrumental value for the self, for example, as leading to success or as avoiding failure and punishment. The Dreaded Self is often described as being unsuccessful or as having bad habits.

Level 3. Individuals describe their Ideal and Real Selves in terms of traits that are based in attitudes as well as actions. These traits typically reflect concerns for being caring and unselfish and for succeeding in peer relationships. At this level there is a sense of unified and unique self. For example, some individuals at this level emphasize that they are unique by noting that they stand out from their peer group because of some particular attribute or combination of attributes. The Dreaded Self is often depicted as have failed to meet social expectations or as self-centered.

Level 4. Individuals describe their Ideal and Real Selves as having a unified identity or character. Some individuals express a desire to make a difference to their society or to the world. Descriptions of the Dreaded Self focus on a failure to live up to one's ideals or role expectations often because of real world pressures.

The Origins of an Efficacious Moral Self

The Ideal, Real, and Dreaded Self descriptions were coded for content. Ideal, Real, and Dreaded Self Descriptions were coded as moral if they contained at least one explicitly moral characteristics (e.g., kind, truthful, and fair). Further content analysis was conducted to determine whether the content was oriented to egoistic concerns (e.g., I want to get a good job so that I'll have lots of money) or to other-oriented concerns (e.g., I'd like to be a doctor because I want to help people).   Finally, self-criticism was coded as follows: 1=totally critical of self, 2=mostly critical of self, 3=some criticism of self, and 4=no criticism of self.

The Self-Evaluation interview transcripts were blind-coded for developmental level by matching the participants' responses to prototypical responses at each level in the Self-Evaluation Coding Guide (Power & Khmelkov, 1997). The Guide was developed from an independent cross-sectional sample of cases, following the bootstrapping method described by Colby and Kohlberg (1987).

The data indicate development by grade for all Self descriptions. Level 1 and 1.5 responses decrease from 6th to 8th Grade while Level 2.5 and 3 responses increase. Level 2 responses are fairly consistent from 6th to the 7th grade and then diminish in the 8th Grade. Levels are correlated by Grade (Real Self r=.38, p<.01; Ideal Self r=.30, p<.05; Dreaded Self r=.33, p<.05).

In order to explore the relationship of the self to moral judgment, we presented the middle school sample with the Promise Dilemma, which asked whether it would be wrong (and why) for a person who accepted payment to distribute advertising flyers to stop working if s/he got hot and tired and no one would ever find out? We know from using Kohlberg's moral dilemmas that "promise" dilemmas in particular "pull" for self-referenced justifications. We coded responses for moral stage and for the level of self involvement coded for their degree of self-involvement according to the following scale: 1=no reference to self; 2=reference to a persistent bad feeling about what happened; 3=reference to feeling shame about how one would appear in another's eyes; 4=reference to feeling guilty about how one would regard one's self.

We found that participants' Stages on the Promise Dilemma are generally higher than the corresponding Self Descriptions Levels. Participants' Stage scores are correlated with Grade (r=.273, p=.06) and with Real Self r=.67, p<.001; Ideal Self r=.46, p<.001; Dreaded Self r=.60, p<.001). Participants' Stage scores on the Promise Dilemma are highly correlated with their Degree of self-involvement (r=.53, p<.001). Only one participant at Stages 1 and 1.5 (20%) makes any reference to the self in giving reasons for why breaking a promise is wrong (see Table 4). Only 15% of respondents at Stage 2.5 and none of the respondents at Stage 3 fail to make any references to the self. References to shame and guilt are made almost exclusively at stages 2.5 and 3. Degree of Self-Involvement is significantly correlated with the Real (r=.50, p<.001), and Dreaded Self Levels (r=.41, p <.001) and Ideal (r=.27, p=.06)

This study confirms that young adolescents are developing a sense of self with important implications for their later engagement as citizens. In contrast with previous studies (Arnold, 1993; Power & Khmelkov, 1997), which found that only about half of the participants used moral categories to describe their Real Selves, 75% of the respondents in our sample used moral categories. This difference may be due to the fact that the previous studies sampled a wide age range or due to other variations in the samples. In our view, the difference suggests that Middle School students are especially concerned about their moral competence. Most of the moral descriptors used by the participants in this study refer to interpersonal moral competence. For example, a sixth grade girl describes herself as a "kind person," who is "nice" to her friends.

Another sixth grade girl speaks of being "nice" as a way of meeting "new people" and giving her a better chance of "having friends." An eighth grade girl notes that she is "respectful" and "always smiling." She also confesses that sometimes has a problem with her attitude: "I don't like the fact that when I have an attitude I sometimes take it out on other people."

A relatively high percentage of students used at least one moral category to describe their Dreaded Selves. Concerns about the Dreaded Self include becoming addicted to drugs, becoming overly aggressive, becoming a mean and selfish person, becoming unemployed and homeless, and becoming "stuck up." As students develop to higher Levels, they describe their Dreaded Selves as less stereotypically "bad" and as more indicative of real possibilities. Sometimes students will note that they do not want to end up like a family member.

Findings that only half of the participants describe their Ideal Selves in moral terms and that only 43% of the participants describe their ideal selves in other-oriented terms raise concerns about their future civic engagement. The participants appear to be far more inclined to use moral and

generally other-oriented qualities in reflecting on the present than they do when they project themselves into the future. Participants' responses suggest that students are deeply influenced by a culture that prizes individual gain and private interest over helping others or serving society. Many participants value doing well in school and see a college degree as a way of securing a good job. Some mention finding jobs, such as being a doctor or lawyer that enable them to help others. None of the participants talk about helping those outside their family and friends as entailed in being a good citizen or as a member of society.

In the second study with a college student population, we build on previous research linking civic engagement to moral identity (Power, Power, & LaVoi, 2005). We show how different kinds of political activity are related different identity and to identity orientations. A growing body of empirical evidence substantiates Blasi's (1993) theory that moral identity leads to moral action (Bergman, 2002) and we see our current work as extending these findings to political involvement.

In examining the relationship between identity and political action, we probe specifically into issues of global responsibility, such as caring for the environment and distributing the goods of the world equitably. Pilot data suggests that those who identify themselves as citizens of the global community are also highly engaged in their national and local communities. What is distinctive about their engagement is the extent to which they engage in social criticism and advocate for structural approaches to problems.

I will conclude with some recommendations for a program of civic education with an emphasis on building identity and moral commitment.