

Research Statement:

Work Conducted Since the Last Tenured Faculty Review (2016-2020)

I study moral development. My research examines how children and adolescents further their moral understandings and their sense of themselves as moral agents through their everyday experiences, and how these developments are shaped by war, violence, and inequality.

I started out my research career working within the widely accepted domain-specific theoretical framework, which has a long tradition in developmental psychology. Nevertheless, as evidence from my research accumulated indicating that interpretation and positionality were central to understanding socio-moral diversity, I became concerned that the research methods typically employed in moral development research — methods that rely almost exclusively on the manipulation of hypothetical stimuli — were unable to fully capture the complexities of children's moral lives. Conceptually, too, I became increasingly troubled by the dearth of attention paid by moral development researchers to children's experiences of moral wrongdoing. Indeed, moral research conducted from widely different theoretical frameworks had long been consumed by arguments concerning the relevance of children's *thinking* about right and wrong, but no one paid attention to children's actual moral wrongdoing or asked how children's very common experiences of doing something they knew was morally wrong may prospectively affect their moral development or their sense of themselves as moral people. Thus I turned my attention to narrative methods, in the hope they would provide a richer means for capturing the meanings children make of their moral lives; and I decided to focus specifically on children's narration of their own moral transgressions, in the hope of elucidating the developmental significance of those experiences. This framework opened the door for examining novel questions of serious import to the field of moral development.

In the past five years (i.e., since my last TFR), I continued refining this conceptual framework and applied it to examining how youth narrate and make sense of their own morally-laden experiences. These include events involving issues as diverse as lying and deception (Smetana, Robinson, Bourne, & Wainryb, 2019; Smetana & Wainryb, under review); transgressions against peers, siblings, and parents (Komolova, Wainryb, & Recchia, 2017; Scirocco, Recchia, Wainryb, & Pasupathi, 2018); prejudice and discrimination (Barreiro, Etchezahar, Ungaretti, & Wainryb, 2018; Barreiro, Ungaretti, Etchezahar, & Wainryb, 2020; Barreiro, Ungaretti, Etchezahar, & Wainryb, in press; Barreiro, Wainryb, & Carretero, 2016; Barreiro, Wainryb, & Carretero, 2017; Komolova, Pasupathi, & Wainryb, 2019); and poverty and inequality (Barreiro, Arsenio, & Wainryb, 2019; Barreiro & Wainryb, in prep). Our work has also continued to examine how the process of narrating these various experiences to and with others contributes to emotion regulation, with measurable consequences for moral development (Pasupathi, Oldroyd, Wainryb, & Mansfield, 2019; Pasupathi, Wainryb, Mansfield, & Bourne, 2017; Pasupathi, Wainryb, Oldroyd, & Bourne, 2019; Recchia, Wainryb, & Dirks, 2019; Wainryb, Pasupathi, Bourne, & Oldroyd, 2018). Collectively, this work has offered a unique glimpse into the

complexities of children's morally-laden interactions; furthermore it made it possible for us to begin considering how children, at different ages, might make sense of and reconcile their own moral transgressions with their moral concepts, and how this process might become integrated into a developing sense of moral agency across both normative and high-risk contexts (Chaplo, Kerig, & Wainryb, 2019; Komolova, Pasupathi, Wainryb, & Lucas, 2017; Pasupathi & Wainryb, 2018; Pasupathi & Wainryb, 2018; Pasupathi & Wainryb, 2019; Pasupathi, Wainryb, Bourne, & Posada, 2018; Recchia & Wainryb, in press; Wainryb, 2017; Wainryb, 2020; Wainryb & Bourne, 2016; Wainryb & Pasupathi, 2018; Wainryb & Recchia, 2017; Wainryb & Recchia, 2018).

Furthermore, since my last TFR a couple of topics have emerged as potentially crucial vectors for understanding adaptive vs. maladaptive developmental pathways, spurring new lines of research. The first issue was our growing findings about youths' experiences with forgiveness and its counterpart, revenge (Recchia, & Wainryb, in press; Recchia, Wainryb, & Pasupathi, 2019; Recchia, Wainryb, & Posada, in press; Wainryb & Recchia, in press; Wainryb, Recchia, Faulconbridge, & Pasupathi, 2019). The importance of the emerging information led us to edit a volume that compiles what is currently known about the experience of revenge across childhood and adolescence across the world – a first research compilation of this kind (Recchia & Wainryb, in press, Cambridge University Press). Evidence about revenge vs. forgiveness as competing resolutions to transgressions and conflicts and its implications for development has also spurred a new line of research exploring the role of restorative justice for addressing cycles of revenge (Velez, Hahn, Recchia, & Wainryb, 2020); the broad interest in this topic is underscored by the recent invitation we received to organize a conversation roundtable for the *Society for Research in Child Development* on restorative practices in schools. The second, more fortuitous, issue was the advent of COVID-19, which created widespread disruption for young college students and their developing sense of autonomy and agency, with the potential for significant impact on adaptation and identity development, especially for students from underrepresented groups. Because the different meanings made of the evolving stressors via narration have the potential for spurring more or less adaptive developmental pathways, in March 2020 we quickly developed a multi-site seed grant (Pasupathi, Wainryb, McLean, Fivush, Greenhoot, & Booker) to conduct a longitudinal study of freshmen in various institutions – a project that will likely initiate additional research in the years to come about narration as a vehicle for adaptation and development in the midst of evolving trauma and distress. Finally, I have continued my research collaborations in Colombia and Argentina dealing with moral development in war-torn and post-conflict environments, and was recently asked to submit an issue for *Child Development Perspectives* (Barreiro & Wainryb, in prep.) on the lessons to be drawn from youths' perceptions of economic inequality in the Global South; I have also been invited to organize and moderate a conversation roundtable for *the Society for Research in Child Development* on the topic of moral development in the Global South and its implications for youths' civic engagement practices.