Paper

**Human
Development**

Developing Moral Agency through Narrative

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Abstract
This paper poses the following question: When, in spite of knowing that it is wrong, people go on to hurt others, what does this mean for the development of moral agency? We begin by defining moral agency and briefly sketching relations between moral agency and other concepts. We then outline what three extant literatures suggest about this question: social domain theory, moral intuitionist theories, and theories of moral identity development. Building on these literatures, but moving beyond them, we propose that experiences of harming others are catalysts for the development of what we term moral agency. In the remainder of the paper, we outline a model for how moral agency develops that draws on research about the narrative development of self. We close by outlining some of the critical directions for future work that are suggested by our approach.   Copyright © 2010 S. Karger AG, Basel

Most people think it is wrong to hurt others. Unfortunately, in a complex social world, most people also occasionally act in ways that hurt others. What does this tension between people's beliefs and their actions mean for moral development? We argue that how people make sense of this tension can facilitate as well as hinder moral development. Specifically, we propose that such instances are a crucible for the development of what we term *moral agency*. Moral agency can be defined as people's understanding and experience of themselves (and others) as agents whose morally relevant actions are based in goals and beliefs.

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Because doing harm presents a tension between principles of justice and care and the person's actions, acts of harm constitute a challenge to the individual's sense of moral agency. Importantly, most adults are capable of constructively making sense of their own harmful behavior as resulting from the complex beliefs and competing goals that they and others bring to their encounters. That sense-making process frequently occurs via the construction of narratives about the event in which people did harm. Those narratives reveal people's understanding that harmful behavior sometimes stems from the need to make difficult choices between one's own desires and those of others, to navigate trade-offs between obligations to other people and oneself, and from the imperfection with which we grasp other people's, and sometimes our own, beliefs and desires. More complex understandings of the situations related to doing harm, even when knowing it is wrong, allow people ultimately to be more forgiving of self and other and to maintain their relationships in the face of occasional hurtful actions. Such understandings allow people to experience themselves as fundamentally moral agents, even when their actions occasionally cause harm.

This conceptualization emphasizes the nature of the act as the core issue in determining whether the person is constructing a sense of moral agency, rather than a sense of agency around other domains. That feature raises two related but distinct issues. One issue is the question of who determines whether an act has moral relevance, or not. There is no simple answer to that question. In some cases, individuals themselves evaluate some of their own actions as having resulted in harm to others [e.g., Baumeister, Stillwell, & Wotman, 1990; Wainryb, Brehl, & Matwin, 2005]. Some acts have intrinsic properties as well such that they have moral relevance whether or not the perpetrator acknowledges this [Turiel, 1998; Wainryb, 2006]. In essence, determining whether an act involves moral elements entails a negotiation between individuals, their social and cultural worlds, and the properties of the acts being negotiated. In many instances, these three elements converge, but in some cases they will not [Smetana, 1982; Turiel, Hildebrandt, & Wainryb, 1991]. When those elements do not converge, the complexities of whether the act is morally relevant need to be taken into account in making sense of the individuals' moral agency in relation to that act. In fact, one element of moral agency for individuals may be evident in their tendency to maximize or minimize the moral relevance of their actions. Adults and children sometimes attempt to resolve challenges to moral agency by focusing on the extent to which they did not really do anything hurtful [e.g., Baumeister et al., 1990; Wainryb et al., 2005]. We return to this issue later in the paper in considering how people's construction of their own behaviors can serve to facilitate the development of moral agency, but can also result in more problematic consequences for moral agency.

Our definition of moral agency focuses primarily on morally relevant actions – actions with implications for principles of justice and care. In relation to such actions, people may consider many issues beyond moral principles [Smetana, 2006; Wainryb et al., 2005]. While people draw fairly clear distinctions between moral and other types of issues [Nucci, 1981; Turiel, 1998], their experience of themselves as moral agents must encompass both moral and nonmoral issues, because people's morally relevant actions arise out of complex and sometimes conflicting desires and beliefs, both moral (e.g., 'it is wrong to hurt someone') and nonmoral (e.g., 'people can choose with whom they want to spend time'). Thus, the actions around which

people are constructing a sense of moral agency must have moral relevance, but the kinds of goals, beliefs, and emotions that constitute their sense of moral agency in relation to those acts can extend well beyond the purely moral.

In connecting the *moral* modifier to the act, and not to the nature of the beliefs and desires that make that act sensible, we are allowing nonmoral goals and beliefs to become part of what we term moral agency. Given a wealth of work on social domain theory, showing that people bring different concerns and judgments to bear on complex social situations, it is reasonable to ask whether moral agency should also be restricted to those emotions, goals, and beliefs that are moral in nature, rather than all the possible emotions, goals, and beliefs that allow individuals to make sense of their morally relevant acts. Our choice to allow moral agency to encompass nonmoral desires and beliefs is a deliberate one and we have made it in order to capture multifaceted aspects of moral agency. We believe that it is meaningful and informative about a person's experience and sense of moral agency when individuals construct morally relevant, harmful actions in terms of nonmoral goals and beliefs. If moral agency is limited only to morally relevant beliefs about morally relevant acts, we could not distinguish between an individual who constructs morally relevant acts as arising out of nonmoral beliefs and desires, an individual who constructs morally relevant acts as arising out of coercion or external pressure, or an individual who constructs morally relevant acts without reference to beliefs or desires. All 3 cases involve problems in moral agency; all 3 might seem 'low' in references to moral goals and beliefs. However, these 3 cases involve distinct, qualitative differences in the experience of moral agency. The former reflects a narrowing of agency that excludes moral concerns from their relevance to the person's actions. The latter individuals may be viewed as lacking moral agency, too – but not in the same sense as the former [e.g., Wainryb & Pasupathi, in press]. Later, when we begin to articulate how one might measure moral agency, we return to these issues. Notably, by conceptualizing moral agency in this manner, we are not expressing the idea that domain distinctions are irrelevant to our conceptualization. Rather, we are beginning with the idea that agency is a singular phenomenon that arises out of complex, multiple, and multidomain desires, beliefs, and emotions. Further empirical work will ultimately help to illuminate whether this approach has flaws, and merits revision.

Relatedly, our use of the term *agency* raises questions about the relationship between our focus on moral agency, and existing literature addressing conceptions of agency. That existing work has emphasized the extent to which people believe their actions to be connected to their goals [e.g., Little, Snyder, & Wehmeyer, in press] and has typically assessed what are called *agency beliefs*. Such beliefs involve people's judgments about whether they *can* enact actions in relation to their goals and obtain desired outcomes – in short, emphasizing control [e.g., Bandura, 1982; Little et al., in press]. This type of work has shown that a greater sense of control over one's actions is associated with better outcomes in the relevant domain (e.g., high agency beliefs in the domain of school are linked to better academic performance [Bandura, 1982; Walls & Little, 2005]). A closely linked literature stems from self-determination theory, and is concerned with the extent to which actions are experienced as fully autonomous and self-chosen, or as relatively externally constrained [e.g., Ryan & Deci, 2000]. As with control-oriented assessments, when people have a sense that their actions are self-determined, they also typically show bet-

ter outcomes, and to some extent these relations may involve mediation by agency beliefs [Walls & Little, 2005]. These paradigms array individuals along a continuum of either more or less agency, depending on their beliefs about their capacity to engage in goal-directed actions or the extent to which they feel that their actions in a given arena are autonomous. In short, the extant literature on agency has emphasized agency as control, and pitted autonomous actions against situational or external constraints.

By contrast, our conceptualization emphasizes the phenomenological experience of moral agency. That experience is not the same as the extent to which the person's actions were more or less controlled, although control over actions is certainly one piece of the phenomenological experience of being a moral agent. The experience of moral agency, however, as noted, entails the experience of actions as arising from multiple goals and situational features, including constraints and pressures. People may experience their actions as autonomous or self-determined even in the face of substantial external constraints, or as not autonomous or efficacious, even in the context of pursuing their own goals. Asking participants to translate the experience of themselves as moral agents in particular situations into aggregate judgments about the extent to which their behavior is controlled or autonomous will result in beliefs that are related to our conceptualization, but which are not precisely the same as the experience of moral agency.

In turn, however, the notion that moral agency is the experience of one's own morally relevant actions as rooted in beliefs and desires raises questions about the relationship between our conception and the broader literature on developing conceptions of mind, which has emphasized understandings of goals, beliefs, and emotions across childhood [e.g., Wainryb & Brehl, 2006; Wellman & Miller, 2006]. Our definition of moral agency is one that depends on children's capacities to understand beliefs and desires, but in contrast to simply understanding those beliefs and desires, we are emphasizing children's use of beliefs and desires to make sense of their experiences. Our own work [e.g., Pasupathi & Wainryb, in press; Wainryb & Pasupathi, in press] suggests that the understanding of beliefs and desires is not synonymous with the capacity to use those concepts to make sense of experience. Put differently, people do not become agents simply by knowing about beliefs and desires, but rather by acting in relation to their own and others' experiences with desires, beliefs, and emotions, and by experiencing their actions as rooted in and related to desires, beliefs, and emotions.

Is this sense of moral agency distinct from conceptions of oneself as a moral person – or moral selfhood or moral identity? Autonomy aspects of moral selfhood have already been addressed above, and existing work on the broader construct of personal agency locates agency as a facet of self [e.g., Little et al., in press]. Here we focus on research that asks people to describe their moral selves in one or another fashion, often in terms of the relative prioritizing of moral values, or in terms of the salience of morally relevant concerns in self-description tasks. An individual's sense of herself as, for example, placing a very high value on justice is distinct from her experience of her own agency when allocating resources between her 2 children. That self-conception might inform or shape part of her thinking and actions in the specific context, but additional aspects of that decision process will be influenced by practical concerns, constraints on time, money, and space, and even her capacity to think deeply about the issue of the moment, rather than make a fast, if less thought-

ful or just, decision. In short, conceptions of oneself as moral are likely to inform the experience of moral agency, but to fall short of being synonymous with the experience of moral agency in particular contexts.

Above, we suggested that doing harm while believing it to be wrong does not produce widespread psychological distress or immorality because these actions are made sense of by adults' rich, complex sense of themselves and others as moral agents. But this claim leaves the question of how that more complex and sophisticated sense of moral agency develops largely unanswered. Moreover, the capacity to construct such complex understandings – to invoke a rich, complex sense of moral agency – is of course constrained by developmental limitations. For example, while even preschool children have a grasp of moral concepts such as justice and harm as distinct from other domains [e.g., Nucci, 2002; Turiel, 1998], as well as a rudimentary sense of concepts like goals and beliefs [e.g., Wainryb & Brehl, 2006; Wellman & Miller, 2006], their capacity to integrate these concepts and make use of them to understand their own and others' harmful behavior is quite limited [e.g., Wainryb et al., 2005; Wainryb & Ford, 1998]. Developments in their understanding of minds, for example, are likely to change their capacity to construct a complex, rich sense of moral agency in narratives about harm doing, as well as to change, in important ways, their experience of engaging in harmful actions.

However, the central claim we make in this paper is that the process of constructing understandings of one's own harmful behavior is a crucible for the development of a more complex, rich, and mature sense of moral agency. Whether, and how, people construct narratives about their experiences of harm doing is a critical process by which moral agency can develop. In what follows, we first examine how existing perspectives on moral development, which typically focus either on reasoning and judgment or on moral identity, rather than on moral agency as we have defined it above, address the issue of the developmental potential of harmful behaviors. We then draw on these literatures and on the emerging narrative and self literature to outline how the process of narrating one's own harmful behavior might further the development of moral agency, as well as the circumstances under which that process might have more problematic consequences.

People's Judgments and Actions Differ because People Are Complicated, Situations Are Complicated, and Judgments Are Complicated

From one perspective, often termed social domain theory, inconsistency between people's beliefs and actions is only apparent. Everyday experiences are complex and often involve both concerns of a moral nature (e.g., fairness, welfare) and of a nonmoral nature (e.g., personal choice, tradition). In such cases, nonmoral concerns may compete for salience with concerns of a moral nature as people construct varied, flexible judgments [Turiel, 1998; Wainryb et al., 2005]. For example, recent work examining children's experiences of interpersonal conflict showed that such experiences frequently entail trade-offs between a child's personal wants and the perceived needs of others [Wainryb et al., 2005]. Consequently, children knowingly sometimes act harmfully towards a peer because, although they construe the harm as wrong, they also construe it as important and legitimate to pursue personal or conventional goals [e.g., Komolova & Wainryb, submitted; Wainryb et al., 2005].

Thus viewed, these data support the claim, by domain theorists, that children's actions do not show a gap with their judgments when those judgments are understood in their full complexity. From this view, then, the question is reformulated as follows: 'is there really a gap between actions and judgments when we fully understand judgments?', and the resulting research emphasis has been on the enormous complexity of sociomoral judgments.

Much of the work on the complexity of sociomoral judgments has been done on what are termed *mixed domain issues* [Smetana, 2006], and in particular, on how people construct judgments under those circumstances, and how they weigh competing concerns. For prototypical moral events, such as whether it is right or wrong to intentionally harm an innocent person (and to a lesser extent conventional and personal events), children's judgments are almost always uniform. In contrast, for mixed domain events, children, and adults as well, make varied judgments. So for example, when people are asked whether or not it is okay to exclude a bad player from a sports team in order to improve the team's chances at winning [Killen, 2007; Killen, Lee-Kim, McGlothlin, & Stangor, 2002] or to help friends and family more than strangers, there is substantially more variability in their judgments. That variability arises from the way people weigh moral concerns with other concerns. Their resulting judgments have been characterized, descriptively, as entailing the subordination of one set of concerns to another, or as ignoring one set of concerns and focusing on another, or as coordinating or integrating both concerns (in compromise types of judgments). Relatively little attention has been paid to factors that predict the prioritization of one or another concern (aside from the importance of that concern within the situation), and the general conclusion has been that judgments about complex events, made by complex individuals, are complicated and variable.

The developmental questions within this framework concern how children come to distinguish moral and other concerns, and how the complexity of their judgments changes as they grow older. Developmentally, children develop a sense of moral concerns as distinct from other types of concerns quite early in life [Nucci, 1981; Turiel, 1998]. Even very young children view harming others as wrong [Smetana, 2006; Turiel, 1998], show evidence of empathy with others' experiences [Eisenberg, Carlo, Murphy, & Van Court, 1995; Rotenberg & Eisenberg, 1997], and consider moral issues as distinct from other domains of social cognition [e.g., Nucci, 1981]. However, that is not to say that developmental changes have no implications for the nature of judgments in situations of competing concerns. Children weight competing concerns in mixed situations differently across different developmental periods [e.g., Helwig, 2002; Killen et al., 2002; Komolova & Wainryb, submitted; Shaw & Wainryb, 2006], making developmental changes one of the critical considerations in just what children and adolescents make of complex situations involving harm. There is also ample evidence that as children develop, their appreciation for the complexities of morally relevant situations changes [Nucci, 1981; Turiel, 1998; Wainryb et al., 2005].

This approach has a great deal of value in underscoring that people, even children, have a complex set of concerns – some moral, some nonmoral but nonetheless legitimate – that they bring to bear, flexibly, on a complex social world. However, this approach gives somewhat short shrift to the psychological experience involved in making such complex judgments and to the developmental implications of doing so.

What does it mean to subordinate, or give priority, or coordinate? If, in making a judgment, an individual subordinates a moral consideration to a conventional or personal consideration, does this mean that she is no longer bothered by the moral implication of her decision or behavior? Are there no developmental implications for constructing a complex judgment?

Judgments and Actions Are Often Governed by Nonconscious, Intuitive Processes; Judgments Made Retrospectively May Serve to Justify Actions Already Taken

In contrast to the central role of reasoning and judgment in the domain theory approaches, Haidt [2008] has offered a *social intuitionist* theory of morality and moral development. This model has two central assertions. The first involves positing that evolutionary processes have shaped many of our intuitions about what is morally right and morally wrong, such that moral judgments are often made in an intuitive, nondeliberative fashion [for a summary of relevant work, see Haidt, 2008]. This first assertion has been criticized by various theorists and defended by Haidt [e.g., Haidt, 2004]. The second assertion is that, following judgment, reasoning processes are engaged to justify and bolster the initial, intuitive judgment. Further, Haidt has proposed [e.g., Haidt, 2008] that this process is most likely to unfold in social settings, via dialogue with others. It is this second assertion that is more relevant to our question, although the majority of findings for the social intuitionist model have focused on the intuitiveness of judgment, rather than on variations in post-judgment processes. Moreover, when researchers in this arena have examined post-judgment processes, their emphasis was on judgments, not acts. The main focus, then, was on the idea that judgments are confirmed by post-judgment deliberation. This is in part because of the tradition, methodologically, of looking at hypothetical scenarios in this work. If we attempt to apply this work to our scenario, we begin with the idea that people have engaged in some harmful act which they intuitively judge as morally wrong.

In the typical context of hypothetical scenarios, people have no investment in changing their judgment of the act as wrong, and post-judgment deliberative processing is likely to confirm their initial judgment. When the acts and judgments involve one's own harm, however, other work suggests that people will likely engage in self-justifying reasoning [see also Jost, Ledgerwood, & Hardin, 2008], although conversation with others may change their minds [Haidt, 2004]. That is, the moral intuitionist model provides relatively little guidance about how people might make sense of their own harm doing, because the types of intuitions people have about their own acts are unlikely to be straightforwardly 'good' or 'bad.'

In considering developmental issues, Haidt [2004] has posited that children and adolescents are exposed to, and immersed in, cultural practices that shape their intuitions about morality. Among these are peer influence processes that unfold at least partially through discourse. However, the reasoning process that is one of the model's central foci is underexplored as a developmental process. Further, the social intuitionist model gives less attention to complex everyday contexts in which moral concerns are juxtaposed with nonmoral considerations. That is, the acts being judged in everyday settings are complex acts, with both legitimate and illegitimate aspects.

In the context of doing wrong, people may focus on justifying their behavior by reversing their moral judgment, but this is not really addressed by the social intuitionist model directly – and it is more likely, given the domain literature reviewed above, that people appeal to multiple, complex considerations in the context of justifying actions that entail harming others.

Behaving Harmfully or Unjustly Is Detrimental to Moral Identity Development

For social intuitionists, because moral judgments are primarily intuitions that are likely to be informed by, but also *defended from* social influence, the post-action justification process is not necessarily treated as having long-term implications for individuals – that is, *as a developmental process.* By contrast, moral identity research has emphasized the potentially lasting effects of wrong doing on viewing oneself as prioritizing moral values. The idea behind moral identity is relatively straightforward. When a presumably good person does a bad thing, some intervening factor, typically emotions, motivations, or identity can account for that gap between judgment and action [e.g., Blasi & Milton, 1991]. Often, moral identity is posited as the intervening psychological structure that lends weight to moral judgments – but to different degrees for different people – and thus individual differences in moral identity explain sustained commitment to moral actions, or an enduring motivation to do the right thing [Colby & Damon, 1992; Hardy & Carlo, 2005; Matsuba & Walker, 2005; Reed & Aquino, 2003]. In other words, in a specific situation, moral emotions and motivations may account for someone's capacity to do the right thing or failure to do so – but over time and repeated occasions, some individuals consistently choose 'the right thing' because they come to identify with moral principles in ways that predictably engender the 'right' moral emotions and motivations. Given that understandings of agency emphasize aligning one's actions with enduring and important values and goals, the prioritizing of moral values makes moral agency of particular relevance to some individuals.

Moral identity has been measured in terms of the importance that a person places, relative to others, on possessing and enacting moral virtues like fairness and caring for his or her identity [Blasi & Milton, 1991; Colby & Damon, 1992; Frensch, Pratt, & Arnold, in press; Hardy & Carlo, 2005; Hart, 2005; Matsuba & Walker, 2005; Reed & Aquino, 2003]. But, as yet, there is no comprehensive developmental account of how moral identity conceptualized in this way actually develops [Hardy & Carlo, 2005]. Research on children's and adolescents' general self-descriptions suggests that moral identity differences are evident in early adolescence [Damon & Hart, 1988], and emerge in the larger context of adolescent identity construction, as with other individual difference aspects of self-conceptions [Damon & Hart, 1982; Harter, 1998; Labouvie-Vief, Chiodo, Goguen, Diehl, & Orwoll, 1995]. One prospective longitudinal study of a small sample of Canadian adolescents suggests no age-related normative changes in moral identity from adolescence into early adulthood, but is limited in statistical power [Pratt, Arnold, Allard, & Tardif-Williams, submitted]. Thus, individual differences in moral value centrality are said to be evident by adolescence, and the only extant longitudinal evidence has found little change into adulthood. Attempts to assess moral identity

or self earlier than adolescence have been complicated by the inclusion of elements of prosocial moral sentiments with emotion contagion, compliance or obedience to authority and rules, rather than a focus on the moral domain [e.g., Harter, 1998; Kochanska, DeVet, Goldman, & Murray, 1994; Laible & Thompson, 2002; Reese, Bird, & Tripp, 2007], and it is somewhat unclear whether children younger than 9 or 10 years can engage in self-reflective description of their endorsement of justice and welfare as guiding principles.

A few emerging findings suggest that idiosyncratic increases in the endorsement of moral values as identity-central may be explained by engagement in prosocial behavior [Frensch et al., in press; Hart, 2005; Matsuba & Walker, 2005]. That is, people first engage in volunteer work or other prosocial acts, and subsequently come to think of issues of justice and welfare as more central to their sense of identity. Some emerging data suggest that reflecting on those prosocial actions is important in this regard [e.g., Hart, 2005; Matsuba, Hart, & Atkins, 2007; Reinders & Youniss, 2006]. In part, however, the focus on prosocial morality by researchers interested in the moral self is limiting. Prosocial morality is discretionary and variable across individuals. By contrast, young children are concerned with moral values and behaviors, and people all over the world share a concern with justice and welfare, view those concerns as transcending rules and cultural practices, and define moral traits in consistent ways [Aquino & Reed, 2002; Turiel, 1998; Wainryb, 2006]. This work has focused on the way people think about moral violations – unfair behaviors and harmful acts. While providing valuable insights about prosocial morality, the extant work on positive acts and reflection on those acts does not address the implications of doing harm for moral identity development.

Although moral identity researchers have not focused extensively on harmful behaviors, one possible implication of doing harm is the darker parallel to reflecting on positive and prosocial acts – that engaging in harmful behavior may lead to subsequent disengagement from important moral values. In fact, particularly because of the post hoc justification process outlined by Haidt, Jost, and others [Baumeister et al., 1990; Greenwald, 1980; Haidt, 2008; Jost et al., 2008; Pasupathi, Mansour, & Brubaker, 2007], people who have engaged in harmful behavior may justify their actions in ways that either result in little change to their sense of themselves, changes towards devaluing moral principles [Bandura, Kurtines, & Gewirtz, 1991; Baumeister et al., 1990], or the construction of a false moral identity [Moshman, 2004; Staub, 2005]. While not all moral identity researchers would endorse this rather grim prospect, some have done so.

Back to Where We Started

We began by posing the question: When, in spite of knowing that it is wrong, people go on to hurt others, what does this mean for the development of moral agency? Three interrelated lines of research on moral development provided some suggestions, but none has fully addressed this particular issue. In the social domain literature, researchers have revealed how complex both actions and judgments can be, and this literature suggests that developmental changes (in conceptual understandings and motivations) and contextual factors (such as the relative priority of one type of concern over another) are relevant for understanding how people may

arrive at their complex judgments. The aftermath of judgments is given relatively less consideration in this literature. The social intuitionist literature suggests that people will have some sense that their harmful actions are wrong, but it is less clear how post-judgment deliberation might result in harsh evaluations of one's actions, versus in self-justifying reasoning, and there is some evidence consistent with the latter. This concern is echoed by researchers interested in moral identity who explore phenomena of moral disengagement. The concern is that the process of justification could exert lasting and detrimental effects on individuals' moral identity development.

So, given that most people are deeply concerned with moral values, and given that most, if not all people will sometimes act in ways that harm others, does this entail implications for our subsequent development of moral agency? Like domain theorists, we believe that situations and people are complex, and this means that most people, despite being good people and believing it is wrong to hurt others, sometimes act unjustly or in hurtful ways. Like social intuitionists, we also believe that people might struggle with the aftermath of their harmful and unjust behaviors, and like moral identity researchers, we also believe that this struggle is one important context in which people may further develop their sense of moral agency. In indirect counterpoint to social intuitionists, we believe that the process of struggling with that aftermath can be positive and can facilitate moral development. In contrast to moral identity researchers, we would suggest that the lasting effects of that struggle may be more evident in aspects of moral development that are distinct from the extent to which an individual values justice or welfare more or less than others – and perhaps better captured by the concept of moral agency. Finally, we are drawing on narrative research traditions as a model for understanding how people can further develop, in the aftermath of their own wrongdoing, the kind of complex and sophisticated sense of moral agency that fosters forgiveness towards self and others.

Building a Narrative Account of Moral Agency and Moral Development

Narrative approaches are perhaps uniquely suited to examining the construction of meanings generally, and the construction of moral agency more specifically. Narrative approaches consider the creation of narratives, perhaps especially in conversations with others, as a paramount developmental process for the formation of a sense of self [e.g., Fivush & Nelson, 2004; McAdams, 2006; McLean, Pasupathi, & Pals, 2007; Pasupathi, 2001; Pasupathi et al., 2007; Thorne, 2000]. Thus far, narrative work on self-development has not addressed moral development specifically [for an exception, see Tappan & Packer, 1991]; frameworks drawn from narrative approaches have instead focused more broadly on a wide array of emotional events and in some cases, general assessments of self or well-being [Bird & Reese, 2006; Fivush & Nelson, 2004; McAdams, 1996; McLean et al., 2007; Pasupathi & Hoyt, 2009; Thorne, 2000]. One of the most useful features of narrative approaches is that narratives both reflect existing conceptions of self, and may also exert prospective influences on future self-views [McLean et al., 2007]. Thus, narrative approaches can accommodate the reciprocal, bidirectional relationships we briefly outlined at the opening of this paper.

What do narratives have to do with moral agency? Recall that we defined moral agency earlier in these terms: the way people construct understandings of their own and others' morally relevant actions – those that involve issues of justice and welfare – as arising from beliefs, desires, emotions, and reflective processes. Defined in this way, when people narrate morally relevant experiences, they engage in constructing an account of actions and consequences that also includes beliefs, desires, and emotions. Each time people engage in that constructive process, they further their understanding of their own and others' moral agency. They may reinforce their grasp of the complexity of individuals, situations, and judgments. They may strengthen their conviction that good people can do harmful things and remain, on balance, good people. They may enhance their capacity to be forgiving of their own, and others', harm. The developmental account that we are proposing, then, is one in which narratives reflect in part a person's existing sense of moral agency, but also serve to construct moral agency in ways that have prospective developmental effects. This process relies not on any single instance, but rather on the accumulation of narrating one's own, and others', harmful behaviors.

Is narrative special, or will any form of reflecting on experience serve? We have chosen to emphasize narration for both pragmatic and theoretically based reasons. Pragmatically, narrative can be defined as a particular mode of reflecting on experience, one that has certain structural properties (story-like structures), and one that is linked to an emerging body of work on self and social cognitive development [e.g., Fivush & Nelson, 2004; McLean et al., 2007]. Theoretically, however, narrative also offers special constraints for reflection that are important, potentially, for the kinds of developmental implications that we outline below. Ultimately, whether narrative is unique or other forms of reflection are useful as well is an empirical question. However, narratives offer a contained way of structuring experience along lines that are linked to cultural tools (i.e., scripts, schemas, themes). General reflection provides no such clear structure and end point. Narratives also are a communicative form that can be shared with important others, who may in fact join in the construction of the stories. This feature of narrative is particularly important, because in joint narration, people can garner new perspectives on events, and can change their initial understandings. For children and adolescents in particular, joint narration with adults may promote development along the lines proposed more broadly by Vygotsky [1978]; joint narration with peers may likewise provide conflicting perspectives that also have an important role in promoting developmental change. In what follows, we consider first why we believe the doing of harm is so important for the development of moral agency, and suggest that when people engage in harm, there is substantial likelihood that they will narrate that harm. We then examine the nature of the narratives that they construct – not all such narratives may further the development of moral agency, and the extent to which narrating harmful behavior furthers moral agency depends on developmental and contextual factors.

What, and Whether to Tell?

Our question emphasizes the doing of harm, over other potentially relevant moral experiences. This choice was deliberate. First, narrative researchers have documented the importance of narrating negative experiences, more so than positive

ones, for furthering self-development in general terms [e.g., Bird & Reese, 2006; McLean et al., 2007]. Given the value that most people place on principles of care and justice, experiences involving harm represent violations of ideals for most people [e.g., Higgins, 1987]; the same cannot be said of prosocial moral acts, given the discretionary nature of doing good. Experiences that violate ideals or expectations are more likely to be narrated, as narrative is often employed to make the unexpected or unusual comprehensible [e.g., Bruner, 1990]. Doing harm while knowing that it is wrong falls into this category of expectation or ideal violations. Finally, experiences of perpetrating harm may offer more complex, difficult, and ultimately fruitful material for constructing a sense of moral agency than do experiences of being victimized. When constructing narratives of instances where they harmed or angered another person, children and adults tend to focus both on their own and their victim's desires, goals, and beliefs, thus grappling directly with issues of agency in the context of moral concerns [Baumeister et al., 1990; Wainryb et al., 2005]. By contrast, experiences of being the victim of harm are typically narrated in relatively egocentric ways that may serve self-protective functions, and are by definition less challenging to a sense of moral agency because the victim him- or herself is not the actor. More broadly, there is evidence that moral transgressions are experiences laden with implications for people's views of themselves as moral beings [e.g., Baumeister et al., 1990; Benke & Wodak, 2003; Krettenauer & Eichler, 2006; Wainryb et al., 2005]. Although emerging evidence suggests a role for positive actions and reflection on those actions in identity development broadly and moral development specifically [e.g., Hardy, Padilla-Walkera, & Carlo, 2008; Hart, 2005; Youniss & Yates, 1997], positive actions are outside the focus of our question here, which concerns the implications of doing harm for moral agency.

Second, although experiences of harm doing may be narrated internally, particularly by adults, we focus more on the developmental implications of the construction of narratives about harm doing in interpersonal contexts, with important others. For young children, the construction of narratives about any experience relies on the collaboration of parents and caregivers [Fivush & Nelson, 2004; Harley & Reese, 1999], and even as children grow into adolescents and adults, the construction of narratives is a process oriented towards audiences [Pasupathi, 2001]. Although some evidence indicates that people are reluctant, in relative terms, to disclose instances of harm doing [Pasupathi, McLean, & Weeks, 2009], this reluctance should not be confused with the absence of a desire to make sense of such experiences by building narratives. In fact, research on adolescents and adults suggests that they construct narratives in conversation with other people for the vast majority of their emotional experiences and this is true across gender and culture [Rimé, Finkenauer, Luminet, Zech, & Phillipot, 1998]. For young children, many of their experiences of doing harm are observed by responsible adults, who press them to recount, and account, for their experiences. It is in this way that moral agency development is furthered, across multiple experiences of harming others and struggling to make sense of that experience. However, as foreshadowed by the work of social psychologists on adults, in struggling to make sense of experiences of doing harm, some kinds of stories may be more helpful to the development of moral agency than others.

What Is the 'Right' Story for Furthering Moral Agency?

Stories can help or hinder moral agency development, and this raises the question of what features of stories are likely to further moral development. Generally, a good story communicates both what happened and what it meant – what Bruner [1990] termed the landscape of action and the landscape of consciousness. That *consciousness* reflects the narrator's sense of agency (or lack thereof) as it was experienced during an event, and constructs that sense of agency in the context of narrating the event. So, narrating morally relevant experiences in terms of not just actions, but the reasons, desires, and emotional consequences associated with those actions is important. These psychological contents allow narratives to construct an understanding of the person's own and others' actions. That understanding can promote forgiveness of self and other, and may also permit different choices in future, similar situations.

Psychological contents in narratives represent the psychological experience of the narrator, but also the inferred psychological experience of others involved in the event. Representing both one's own and others' psychological content constructs a world in which agents interact, come into conflict, and in which different individuals have their own internal experiences. Thus, an additional aspect of a 'good' story about doing harm involves the balance of one's own versus others' psychological experiences. While in a personal story, the narrator's perspective is often represented more fully than that of other people, narratives which incorporate other people's subjectivity alongside that of the narrator represent a different way to be a moral agent than more lopsided or purely self-centered narratives [Wainryb & Pasupathi, in press].

The inclusion of psychological contents can, however, also serve defensive purposes rather than fostering moral agency development. In research looking at adult narratives about anger and conflict, people talking about having hurt others often provide information about their own goals, assumptions, beliefs, and emotional responses that mitigate the extent to which their experience signifies (to themselves and others) that they are 'bad,' uncaring people [e.g., Baumeister et al., 1990; see also Wainryb et al., 2005]. In fact, these findings can be read as consistent with the concerns of those working on moral disengagement and related ideas [Bandura et al., 1991; Jost et al., 2008]. We would argue that the issue is more complicated. Harming others and being harmed are inevitable parts of social life and result from the varied and complex concerns that are involved in any particular event. Thus, the kinds of reasons and mitigating details that people include in their stories about wrong doing often reflect what actually happened (or what people believed to have happened) as they experienced the event, rather than merely serving as self-protective distortions [Wainryb, 2000; Wainryb et al., 2005]. Importantly, we do not claim that such narrative constructions are neutral or objective, rather, that people may reflect on mitigating circumstances for and external constraints on their harmful actions without the intent to self-protect or distort their experiences.

Second, because doing harm is inevitable, the capacity to restore one's sense of being a reasonably decent person is vital for being able to function in a social world. If every instance of doing harm resulted in an incremental increase in viewing oneself as a bad person, eventually, the realities of social life would become unbearable. Further, understanding the concerns that mitigate the self-related implications of

one's own bad deeds lays a foundation for forgiving the harms that others do – as this is the primary route by which we can grasp that others also do harm without being bad people. As a consequence, one very important empirical question concerns the ways in which psychological content that is self-protective or self-restorative serves to further moral development, and the development of moral agency in particular, and the types of psychological content which may both protect the self and diminish moral agency. Narratives that include references to beliefs and goals that formed the foundation of people's behavior can restore the sense of being a good, though imperfect, person and promote the sense of being an agent that makes choices. On the other hand, narratives in which the act of choosing is diminished, a story where circumstances dictated one's actions without reference to internal decision processes, however implicit such thinking may have been at the time [Wainryb, Komolova, & Florsheim, 2009], may diminish moral agency while protecting the self. Further, narratives that minimize the consequences to the victim of one's wrong doing are also likely to diminish moral agency rather than promote it – and these kinds of narratives recall the earlier issue of negotiating between internal (actor-driven) and external ways of defining acts as morally relevant [e.g., Baumeister et al., 1990].

In considering how narratives serve to construct and promote the development of moral agency, then, we focus on three relevant aspects of narrative: a focus on psychological experience (consciousness) as well as actions, the representation of own and others' psychological experience, and whether that representation constructs a sense of agency or diminishes that sense. Below, we consider developmental and contextual factors that promote greater representation of psychological contents, and greater representation of others' as well as one's own psychological experience. We advance some speculations about developmental and contextual factors that reduce the likelihood people will construct defensive narratives that diminish agency, but this is an area where very little work has been done. Throughout, it is important to recall that the relations between narrative construction and moral agency development are bidirectional and reciprocal. A person's extant sense of moral agency will shape the narratives people can construct, and the narratives, in turn, can further or hinder development of moral agency.

Developmental Factors

Regardless of age, children hold a genuine concern for others and have a sense of themselves and others as moral agents. However, age differences are evident in the limited sophistication and coherence with which that concern can be expressed and reflected upon, as well as the difficulties very young children have with connecting their concern for others' perspectives to their judgments [see also Shaw & Wainryb, 2006; Wainryb et al., 2005; Wainryb & Ford, 1998]. Over childhood, the capacity to construct a sense of moral agency in narratives about harming others should be enhanced by developments in a number of capacities – including developments in theory of mind [Chandler & Lalonde, 1996; Wainryb & Brehl, 2006], perspective taking [e.g., Gurucharri & Selman, 1982], understandings of self and biography [Habermas & Bluck, 2000], understanding and tolerance for diversity of beliefs [e.g., Wainryb, Shaw, Langley, Lewis, & Cottam, 2004], and the salience of

identity construction as a developmental task [Chandler, Lalonde, Sokol, & Hallett, 2003; Erikson & Erikson, 1997; Habermas & Bluck, 2000; Harter, 1998]. Our own findings, focusing on morally relevant events, have demonstrated that increases in the elaboration of psychological content from preschool through mid-adolescence are distinct from other types of content in narratives [Pasupathi & Wainryb, in press]. Psychological content, in particular, is present in low but stable proportions until adolescence, when sharp increases are observed. That pattern is similar for psychological content about one's own experience and the inferred interpretive experience of others. Thus, psychological content in morally relevant narratives shows a sharp jump in the transition to adolescence. This increase is evident in both representations of one's own psychological experience and the inferences made about others' psychological experience; thus, the same developmental changes appear to promote both the representation of psychological contents in general and an appropriate level of attention to both self and other's psychological experience, or agency, in this context.

Related to the increase in psychological content is the issue of informational assumptions in moral judgment – the fact that children and adults judge moral acts in relation to the actor's known or inferred assumptions about reality [Wainryb, 1991; Wainryb & Ford, 1998]. While people share common concerns with justice and fairness, their evaluation of specific acts in specific contexts depends on what they assume to be true and on what they understand about the actor's beliefs about truth [e.g., Wainryb & Ford, 1998]. Development in theory of mind entails the gradual understanding that beliefs are constructions of reality that may differ across persons, but theory of mind researchers have not examined how children or adults evaluate such diversity of beliefs. Developmental changes in the way children and adults think about divergent beliefs [Kuhn, Cheney, & Weinstock, 2000; Wainryb et al., 2004] may also have potentially important implications for the construction of moral agency in narrative. While even fairly young children (under 7 years of age) do account for different beliefs in judging moral acts [Wainryb & Ford, 1998], children demonstrate increasing tolerance and relativism as they grow older [Kuhn et al., 2000; Wainryb et al., 2004]. Not surprisingly, then, for children under the age of 7 or so, moral judgments are less likely to account for possible differences in the beliefs behind morally relevant acts. Narrative work suggests that everyday acts of harm will often involve divergent beliefs or conflicting goals [Wainryb et al., 2005]; thus, developmental changes in the way children can construct narratives that reflect such divergence, as well as changes in their stance towards diversity of beliefs, will also enhance the complexity of their sense of their own and others' moral agency.

Beyond representing and taking into account the role of beliefs and goals in people's actions, the ways in which children represent those aspects of people's actions also change qualitatively with age. Psychological content can range from the simple desires or goals that 5-year-olds articulate in explaining their own and others' behaviors [e.g., Pasupathi & Wainryb, in press; Wainryb, 2006], to the complex beliefs and ideologies that outline long-term identities and which emerge later in adolescence and early adulthood [Habermas & de Silveira, 2008; McLean & Pratt, 2006]. These qualitative shifts provide a possible link between the development of moral agency and the small, but existing variation between people in moral identity [Aquino & Reed, 2002; Hardy & Carlo, 2005; Reed & Aquino, 2003] as well as

the variation in generalized agency beliefs [Little et al., in press]. That is, out of continuities in the experience of moral agency, variation in people's generalized beliefs may be constructed, although at present, this is a speculation in need of empirical work.

These same developmental changes do not address whether children of different ages, or adults for that matter, are more or less likely to construct defensive, self-protective narratives rather than narratives that further their sense of themselves and others as moral agents. Existing work on normative samples has not directly examined age differences in the construction of narratives that minimize the harm to the victim or create accounts reflecting a diminished sense of choice or possibility. Other features of narratives about harm, such as the greater complexity of narratives about the doing of harm versus being the targets of harm, are consistent across different ages in childhood [e.g., Wainryb et al., 2005]. Some small-scale, qualitatively oriented work suggests that adolescents may acquire a number of narrative strategies that manage the impressions of others in the context of talking about potentially problematic topics [Korobov & Bamberg, 2004], but this work did not examine age differences, nor was it concerned particularly with issues of moral agency.

Contextual Factors

Narratives are always constructed in context, and contexts play an important role in shaping the types of stories people tell [Fivush & Nelson, 2004; Pasupathi, 2001]. For fostering attention to psychological content in constructing narratives, it is clear that listeners who are responsive and moderately supportive are helpful across the lifespan [Cleveland & Reese, 2005; Fivush & Nelson, 2004; Pasupathi, 2001; Pasupathi & Hoyt, 2009]. Much of the time, with family and close friends, listeners provide strong support for whatever narrative the speaker constructs. Moreover, given that conditions of threat enhance people's tendencies to support the status quo, derogate out-groups, engage in aggression, and ignore injustices in favor of narrow self-interest [Jost et al., 2008; Niesta, Fritsche, & Jonas, 2008], listener behavior that induces a sense of threat, via challenges or unresponsiveness, may likewise promote self-defensive narration. For moral agency development, in fact, listeners who are both responsive and moderately, or warmly challenging of self-protective strategies may be most helpful in furthering the development of moral agency. Such listeners are uniquely positioned to both encourage people to think about the psychological aspects of their wrong doing, and to support their exploration of alternatives. However, caution is warranted here for two reasons. First, disagreement can also backfire, reinforcing existing self-views [e.g., Pasupathi & Rich, 2005], and disagreement can certainly create sufficient threat to promote self-defensiveness. Second, as we noted earlier, self-protective narration is not uniformly to be avoided – there is value in protecting some self-regard while acknowledging wrong doing. Understanding how to effectively challenge and channel self-protective storytelling in order to further moral agency remains an important issue for future research.

For children and adolescents, the possible world of listeners includes parents and friends, among others [Bukowski, Newcomb, & Hartup, 1996; Hartup, 1996].

Broadly, parents are concerned with the *future* of their children, in terms of morals, values, relationships, and academic/career achievements [Arnold, Pratt, & Hicks, 2004; Hoffman, 1994; Meeus, Oosterwege, & Vollebergh, 2002; Smetana & Asquith, 1994]. Further, parents are important sources of authority and information about morality [Hardy et al., 2008; Smetana & Asquith, 1994], and the extent to which adolescents represent, and are responsive to, their parents' perspectives on values is associated with their adjustment in early adulthood [Arnold et al., 2004; Pratt, Arnold, & Mackey, 1999]. Across a wide age range, parental discussions of real-life moral dilemmas with their children predict development of those children's moral reasoning over 2 years [Walker & Taylor, 1991; see also Hardy et al., 2008; Hoffman, 1994]. The specific behaviors of parents that were linked to advances in the complexity of children's moral reasoning included Socratic-style questioning of the child, along with presentation or 'modeling' of sophisticated reasoning. More recent work suggests that parents who support their children's autonomy also appear to foster their children's truly prosocial tendencies [Hardy et al., 2008; Roth, 2008], and one way to support autonomy involves, as noted earlier, encouraging a child's unique perspective on his or her memories [Cleveland & Reese, 2005].

Most work on children's reconstruction of the past in narrative form has not focused on morally relevant events per se, but rather on emotional or disobedience-related experiences that may or may not be related to issues of justice and welfare [e.g., Fivush & Nelson, 2004; Reese et al., 2007]. Laible [e.g., Laible, 2004; Laible & Thompson, 2002] has examined mother-child dyads reminiscing about prior misbehavior and good behavior with preschool-aged children, and has looked at how such reminiscing is connected to a wide array of socioemotional competence indicators. Her findings suggest that mothers who elaborate narratives with their young children may foster a broad array of positive developmental outcomes, ranging from the ability to comply with a maternal order (not necessarily connected to morality), to emotional understanding and relationship conceptions.

The period from late childhood through young adulthood coincides with a major shift from parents as the primary audiences for personal storytelling to friends as an additional, and very important audience for such stories [Buhrmeister, 1996; Cooper, 1999; Hartup, 1996; Hazan & Zeifman, 1994; McLean, 2005; Updegraff, McHale, & Whiteman, 2006]. Nevertheless, there is little empirical work bearing on friends' influences that is specifically focused on moral development. Recently, Daddis [2008] suggested that friends help adolescents anticipate what the 'right' level of personal freedom is, thus indirectly informing adolescents' delineation of autonomy vis-à-vis other domains, including the moral domain. One of the central debates in research on friends has concerned whether similarity among friends results from selection ('birds of a feather'), indirect influences via norm setting, or more explicit socialization processes such as discursive behavior. Depending on the method and particular study, evidence for all of these processes can be found. Some findings examining deviant and criminal behavior point again to narratives about deviance – but in this case, suggesting that peers can promote transgressive behavior via encouraging the construction of positive, exciting, and peer-validated narratives about deviant behavior [e.g., Dishion, McCord, & Poulin, 1999; Granic & Dishion, 2003].

Thus, even when they are equally responsive as listeners, parents and friends can be expected to shape children's and adolescents' stories – and moral agency

within their stories – in distinctive ways because of their distinctive relationships. The minimal existing evidence suggests that parent-adolescent conversations about important experiences, as compared to friend-adolescent conversations, are more likely to involve challenges to the adolescent's views [Weeks & Pasupathi, in press], and that adolescents whose parents' perspectives are less salient in their written narratives about important values and experiences are also at risk for negative outcomes [Mackey, Arnold, & Pratt, 2001; Pratt et al., 1999]. This is not to imply that adolescents do not construct a sense of moral selfhood in discussing experiences with their friends – or to deny that friends can play the role of responsive, supportive, challengers of self-protective strategies. Further, not all parents are capable of being helpful audiences to their adolescent children [e.g., Weeks & Pasupathi, in press]. Clearly, a better understanding of the way different audiences for storytelling impact the extent and kind of psychological content in those stories is an important goal for future work.

Societal Contexts

In addition to the more proximal context of listeners, narratives are also constructed within a societal context – by which we mean cultural, subcultural, political, economic, historical, and geographic variations that are associated with the frames that people may use to make sense of their experiences. Existing research on narrative and moral development, however, is typically embedded within a cross-cultural comparison approach to questions about societal contexts.

In that vein, narrative researchers have primarily compared East Asian (Chinese) and US American samples and have found differences in narratives that children and adults from these two distinct societies construct [e.g., Han, Leichtman, & Wang, 1998; Wang, 2004]. European Americans, in comparison to Asians, typically create more elaborate and specific memories, with a greater emphasis on personal content rather than relational content, and a lesser emphasis on obligations to others (often viewed as indicating differences in prioritizing morality). However, a wealth of work on moral development across cultures suggests few or no differences in the acquisition and endorsement of principles of justice and fairness by people around the world [Turiel, 1998; Wainryb, 2006]. For considering the development of moral agency, then, the two relevant literatures provide divergent sets of findings. What can we make of the differences in self and story, on the one hand, and the absence of differences in moral development, on the other?

One possibility is that an explicit focus on morally relevant experiences in narrative work might suggest fewer cross-cultural differences than are elicited by the currently employed narrative tasks that focus on basic emotions or on obedience and social conventional concerns. In that sense, cultural variations in narrative that have been documented in the existing literature do, in fact, reflect differences in self and in story – but the true test of whether those differences also extend to a narrative conceptualization of moral agency has yet to be done. That true test needs to entail comparisons of both different cultural groups and morally relevant versus nonmorally relevant experiences. For example, in work by Wang and colleagues [Han et al., 1998; Wang, 2004], European American samples did not narrate emotional experiences about sadness, or fear, or anger in ways that similarly emphasize obligations

and concern for others to the extent that East Asian groups did. However, in narratives about hurting or angering others reported by Wainryb and colleagues [Wainryb et al., 2005] and by Baumeister and colleagues [Baumeister et al., 1990], US children and adults clearly focused on their obligations and concerns for others, as well as on their own experiences.

Although this is speculative, another possibility is that, given substantial cross-cultural consistency in major moral values and their developmental acquisition and use, variability across stable and functioning cultures and nations may be the least interesting and important place to look for the importance of culture. Further, cultural contexts in which group conflicts are highly salient, or contexts that offer everyday experiences that are at odds with more general moral principles [e.g., Daiute, 2009; Posada & Wainryb, 2008; Wainryb et al., 2009; Wainryb & Pasupathi, 2008; Wainryb & Pasupathi, in press], may be the most important places within which to examine cultural variations in the development of moral agency. Notably, those contexts may be found in comparisons between cultures but are also strongly evident in comparisons within cultures of groups whose experience of the justice system, for example, varies within the broader context [e.g., Flanagan, Cumsille, Gill, & Gallay, in press; Huo, Smith, Tyler, & Lind, 1996]. Similarly, gendered variation may be more evident when the everyday experiences of men and women entail gendered injustice [Turiel & Wainryb, 1994; Wainryb & Turiel, 1994], and the extent and nature of gendered injustice also varies across and within cultures in important ways. Put briefly, variations in the extent to which violence, injustice, and harm are *normative* facets of life, and variations in the societal schemes available to make sense of that harm, are likely to be important influences on the development of moral agency.

Some Conclusions and Future Directions

In this paper, we have proposed looking at how people construct morally relevant experiences in narrative to provide a more extensive understanding of the development of moral agency. This narrative approach draws upon prior work on moral development highlighting processes by which children (and adults) reflect on their everyday experiences around moral concerns. At the same time, it moves beyond earlier attempts to move in a narrative direction [e.g., Tappan & Packer, 1991] to provide a testable model in line with empirically and quantitatively oriented approaches. Our approach has some overlaps with ideas about schema and script knowledge about morality and the internalization processes emphasized by earlier scholars [e.g., Hoffman, 1994; Lapsley & Narvaez, 2004], and, as with other related approaches, one could think of narrative construction as the process by which scripts and schemata relevant to moral actions are developed, internalized, and can also be changed. Having outlined the concept of moral agency, and the way that moral agency can be furthered via the construction of narratives about harm, we end our proposal with an outline of a few of the questions we believe can be tested using our framework.

The first questions concern more work examining the development of moral agency. We have begun to document sharp increases in the construction of one's own and others' interpretive experience when narrating morally relevant events [Pasupathi & Wainryb, in press]. Further, the extant evidence about the development of

moral agency cannot provide evidence that narration plays a causal role in that development, because it generally employs cross-sectional designs. While some narrative work has supported the causal force of narrative in influencing memory and self via experimental or prospective longitudinal work [e.g., McAdams et al., 2006; Pasupathi & Hoyt, 2009; Sutin & Robins, 2008], this work has not examined moral agency.

Second, understanding how people strike a balance, over time and across multiple experiences, between self-protection and genuine acknowledgment of their own wrong doing remains an important focus of future work. Future work in this vein needs to consider the way that complex constructions of agency can translate into a sense that acts which result in harm are chosen and different choices may be made in the future, versus a sense that harm results from external or internal constraints and circumstances, from a lack of agency, and therefore, future harm is inevitable. Further, it will be important to examine variations in the qualitative aspects of moral agency as well as variation that speaks to having *more* or *less* of such agency. As suggested in our opening section, people may construct a problematic sense of moral agency while preserving a high level of overall agency, diminishing their own agency at the expense of powerful others, or suppressing any notion of agency at all [Wainryb, 2009; Wainryb & Pasupathi, in press]. The implications for future choices are very different in these 3 cases, at least from a theoretical vantage point. As we noted in the beginning, if empirical work suggests that these 3 patterns all appear to be similar in their functional consequences, then it may be reasonable to reconsider the conceptualization of moral agency. At present, however, we believe that a conceptualization that permits more nuances than simply high and low will be of greater value for furthering research.

Some of the balance of self-protection and acknowledgment may relate to the distinct audiences with whom people, and particularly children, engage in narrating harm. As we noted, parents are likely to be motivated to help children and adolescents draw insights from occasions where they hurt others even when such insights may be painful, although there are likely to be substantial between-family variations in this tendency. In contrast, we expect friends to help people reject negative self-implications in acts of perpetration, and to support the maintenance of self-views as a good person. This combination is important in fostering moral agency development – as individuals can feel both supported and challenged across different social contexts. More broadly, the distinct audiences provided by different relationships are likely to foster developmental changes in many adaptive ways. Under some circumstances, however, the different types of audiences that parents and peers represent can result in incoherent narrative selves in more problematic ways [Weeks & Pasupathi, in press], and this is also a question for future work.

We have focused here on the doing of harm, for all the reasons noted above. However, the narrative approach may also be expanded to examine other types of morally relevant events. We have already mentioned the emerging findings on reflection processes and prosocial acts above. These findings generally suggest that engagement in prosocial behavior and reflection on that behavior can promote moral development and other positive outcomes [e.g., Hart, 2005; Youniss & Yates, 1997]. There may also be important distinctions within different types of harm doing that are relevant to fully understanding the development of moral agency. The broader cultural and gender contexts of constructing morally relevant experiences also mat-

ter, and there is much room for more work in the realm of culture, morality, and agency. For children growing up in the midst of conflict, the way they come to terms with the violations of welfare and justice that surround them is critical for their capacity to avoid perpetuating such violations as adults [Posada & Wainryb, 2008; Wainryb & Pasupathi, 2008, in press]. In some of our work, we have shown that children in these circumstances show deficits in representing themselves and others as moral agents in their narratives about harm – deficits that are problematic for future conflict resolution [Wainryb & Pasupathi, 2008, in press].

Finally, we expect the development of moral agency to connect to other aspects of moral and social development. We noted earlier that the construction of moral agency may relate to the small, but evident [Aquino & Reed, 2002] variation in moral identity that has been examined by various researchers. Our own past work [e.g., Shaw & Wainryb, 1999, 2006; Wainryb, 2000, 2004; Wainryb & Brehl, 2006; Wainryb et al., 2005; Wainryb & Ford, 1998] suggests that developmental changes in moral agency will also be intimately related to the ways in which people of different ages make moral decisions and moral judgments. As an example, in the study reviewed earlier [Wainryb et al., 2005], in which children and adolescents from 5 to 16 years of age told stories about a time when they had hurt a peer and a time when they had been hurt by a peer, we noted significant age differences in the interpretive and psychological content of their narrative accounts, with older children and adolescents producing more psychologically elaborated narratives than younger children. Significant age differences were also found in participants' moral judgments, with adolescents' judgments being more nuanced than those of younger children, and also more forgiving of both themselves and others. Thus, although this has not been explicitly tested, it is likely that the more sophisticated and elaborated their psychological content in those narratives, the more children and adolescents were capable of seeing the complexity of their own and others' moral choices, and evaluating them accordingly.

This last point, perhaps more than any other, illuminates the importance of looking at moral agency in ways that encompass more than individuals' identities or the complexity of judgments about messy situations, and which consider the developmental implications of post-action judgment processes. Because in a social world, doing and experiencing harm is inevitable, we need to understand not just what underlies sustained and extensive altruism, or what might get in the way of inclusiveness, but also the aspects of moral development that foster the ordinary, but vitally necessary capacities for forgiveness and repair.

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