

The Relationship Between Personality Traits and Moral Development During Adolescence

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Abstract. The relationship between adolescence, personality, and moral development is inseparable since it is a critical transitional period; therefore, the traits and temperament adolescents show can highly predict what their personalities are like in adulthood and therefore can influence how they behave in moral judgment. Research on moral psychology suggests that personality holds a strong relationship with morality, positive traits highlighted by sympathy and consciousness are likely to promote prosocial behaviors. In contrast, negative ones such as the Dark Triad traits always give rise to antisocial behaviors. Callous-unemotional traits are another potent reflection of personality. These traits exhibit a negative correlation with social rightness since the individual diagnosed with these traits feels less guilty of committing a crime. On the other hand, they are enabled to trigger atypical moral development like moral disengagement. Environmental factors, for example, childhood psychological maltreatment, can also contribute to moral progression by interacting with the factors we are talking about. The review traces how personality and morality develop and interrelate in a particular time –adolescence.

Keywords: Personality, moral development, adolescence, callous-unemotional traits.

1. Introduction

Personality reflects people's characteristics and patterns of thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. Moral development centers on the emergence, evolution, and comprehension of moral principles from early childhood to adulthood. Adolescence, on the other hand, is characterized as a transitional phase of both physical and psychological growth that typically spans from puberty to adulthood. Adolescence is a critical period for people to shape their personalities and morality. By examining the moral developmental stage in adolescence, we can improve the intervention related to adolescents' antisocial behaviors and inform them how to positively interact with society and promote prosocial behaviors. The lack of understanding of the importance of this developmental stage can lead to a miss of the best time in moral development therefore resulting in a deficient personality.

According to the review from McAdams and Bradley, personality psychology has developed a lot in the past two decades. Importantly, personality traits can be generally confirmed to be vital predictors of behavior and people's life outcomes. There are three personality constructs mentioned in this paper which are traits, adaptations, and narratives. These can also be explained from three aspects that are related to personality developments through the human lifetime which are a) the individual as an actor (engaging in behaviors), b) the individual as an agent (pursuing goals), and c) the individual as an author (constructing narratives). As detailed by the author, the dispositional perspective, for example, variations like the Big Five are fundamental units that mark everyone's individuality. In other words, the traits and temperament kids show in adolescence can be linked to their personality during their adulthoods. According to longitudinal studies, this temporal stability is more likely to be improved as people get older, but their traits can also vary according to each age stage which is dependent on how mature their dispositional signature is. Change in setting goals is another aspect that can highlight personality development since older adults usually set more realistic and less conflicting goals compared to younger ones as an agent. For the third aspect, people usually begin to act in their narrative identities from late adolescence when their dispositional traits are generally framed so that they can fully explore their unique meanings, suggesting a process of integration and completion of personality and autobiographical reasoning. Therefore, it can be

concluded that personality development through human life is complicated and multilayered. Dispositional traits, characteristics adaptation, and narrative identity work together to be predictable and determinant for people's personality development through five developmental milestones with distinct changes in each developmental course and tend to be coherent and stable through the progress [1].

In another review paper, Hart and Carlo examined the interrelationship between morality and adolescence. The paper suggests that adolescence is a critical time for moral development since it is a transitional period from childhood to adulthood and adolescents devote more time to their peers in social environments therefore developing their social commitment [2]. The author first points out that political and theoretical reasons both exert the importance of moral development. A recent national poll demonstrates that the public tends to speak negatively about adolescents. Moreover, the more developed expertise through adolescence makes them achieve more in moral development. Then, they review the constitution of moral development which consists of abundant domains such as the prosocial domain and these different focuses give rise to many unsolved problems in this field. When it comes to studies concerning moral development in adolescence, self-reporting always becomes the primary resource in data collection. Developmental researchers usually favor this longitudinal, correlational study method since it is reliable and valid most of the time though it can be limited in certain aspects such as peer associations. However, more research methods are needed for this field of study to establish more consolidated relationships and theories. Several major influences in adolescents' morality are found besides moral cognitions and socialization agents, which are biological factors such as hormonal changes or specific neurotransmitters. Peers are also vital for providing opportunities for adolescents to participate in socializing experiences and personal moral judgments. Finally, moral culture among adolescents is mentioned, which is likely to be influenced across distinct societies as a product of culturally based moral transmitters. They call for attention to their own moral culture among adolescents therefore we can learn more about their complexity.

Although there has been much research and studies concerning personality traits and moral development respectively. The interconnection between them among adolescents is absent, and that is why I am writing this review. I am going to demonstrate studies that are related to this gap and discuss them concerning personality traits and moral development during adolescence.

2. The Association between Specific Personality Traits and Moral Development

2.1. The General Effects of Personality Traits

Anticipated emotion refers to emotions that a person is expecting to feel when confronting an upcoming event. For example, a person would expect to experience sorrow if he/she does not pass the next exam. During adolescence, people are more likely to use these anticipated emotions, which can be subjective to make judgments toward the surrounding environment over those social norms established and accepted by society. Adolescents tend to prioritize moral actions over immoral ones since the anticipated emotions such as pride and self-satisfaction are based more on internal moral motivation rather than external perceptions of rightness. Moreover, conscientiousness and agreeableness are traits that are more linked to higher morality. Krettenauer et al. conducted standardized and easily defined hypothetical moral dilemmas experiments to clarify the influence of time, story context, and personality characteristics (agreeableness, conscientiousness). They conducted such a longitudinal survey among three ages: 6, 15, and 21 years with a multiple informant. As a result of this study, the levels of conscientiousness and sympathy in T1 are highly predictable to the pattern of being morally virtuous during later adolescence. There was no story effect in T3, which confirms that early adolescents can be more self-centered in moral decisions, consistent with results reported that personality traits play a role in shaping moral emotion anticipations. The relatively rare regret found in both late adolescence and early adulthood may be explained by decreasing self-conflicting decisions. Moreover, the rise in positive anticipated emotions that come with prosocial decisions can correspond with higher levels of adolescents' internal moral motivations (agreeableness,

conscientiousness) [3]. This can also be further associated with sympathy, which appears to be systematically related to the development of moral emotion expectancies during adolescence and early childhood. Although instances of happy victimizer responses are rare in early adulthood, they can serve to maintain positive moral decisions. These results suggest that adolescents are more likely to make self-centered moral decisions due to anticipated emotions, and these can reveal long-term personalities formed during adolescence. As a result, their personality, especially conscientiousness and agreeableness are driven by emotions which makes them feel better about moral things.

Sympathy is referred to as a feeling of concern for those who are going through painful situations. For instance, if a person goes to see another sad man, he/she can imagine how grief the person is and feel empathetic to his situation. Parenting is considered to have a direct link with moral development among adolescents with more positive parental inductions resulting in higher levels of prosocial behaviors, which cover a wide range of actions aimed at benefitting other people, such as helping. The experiment conducted by Shen et al. suggested that the relationship between parenting and prosocial moral reasoning can be partly influenced by sympathy. Early adolescence is crucial in developing moral reasoning since it marks the progression to more advanced forms of reasoning. Parenting, which can include both positive and negative aspects, can be related to prosocial behaviors. To be more specific, when parental guidance involves considerations of how an individual's actions affect others, it tends to promote prosocial behaviors in children. The experiment included early adolescents, and participants answered various questions that assessed different aspects of reasoning, most of which were completed in their homes. As a result, sympathy (personality factor) was the only variable consistently correlated with the composite moral reasoning score with consistency. Overall, the findings exhibited that the direct links between parental guidance and prosocial moral reasoning are absent. Instead, parental guidance indirectly predicts prosocial moral reasoning through its influence on sympathy [4]. Improving positive parenting practices can lead to an increase in prosocial behaviors among adolescents, as parental induction plays a significant role in shaping their moral reasoning. However, a direct relationship between them has not yet been indicated. Therefore, it is clearer to learn that parental induction plays a promoting role in personality cultivation, particularly in empathy, which is a crucial transitional factor for prosocial behaviors.

Prosocial moral reasoning involves the process of reasoning in the context of a person's desires and needs conflict with what laws and authorities stipulate. This prosocial moral development may be predicted by empathic tendencies. Generally, there is a positive relationship between empathic concern and engaging in prosocial actions. Additionally, higher levels of prosocial moral reasoning are correlated with an increased probability of doing prosocial actions. Mestre and her team conducted a longitudinal study in Spain, and the final sample included those who completed all three surveys. This study included attrition analyses and descriptive, and correlations analysis. They found that empathic concern, perspective-taking, and prosocial moral reasoning were all positively interconnected throughout the study period. Moreover, their findings support the idea that early prosocial behaviors can influence an individual's prosocial tendencies in the future. However, the effect of perspective-taking can also lead to antisocial behaviors rather than some positive prosocial behaviors we expected. Specifically, prosocial behaviors usually predict altruistic but not public ones. Another finding suggests that developing more prosocial moral reasoning can encourage empathic tendencies, aligning with selfless-formed prosocial behaviors [5]. Perspective-taking can be an indirect indicator of prosocial moral reasoning, however, when it comes to empathic concern, it would positively affect prosocial behaviors in adolescence by influencing prosocial moral reasoning among adolescents.

The Dark Triad comprises three traits, they are Narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy. They are frequently placed in opposition to positive personality frameworks. On the other hand, moral identity is the importance of an individual's identity of being a morally right person. However, these Dark Triad traits represent different characteristics of personality. For example, Machiavellianism marks manipulative behavior; narcissism is marked by excessive grandiosity and self-centeredness

while psychopathy is highlighted by impulses and callousness. Thus, their relationship with morality can differ from trait to trait.

The Dark Triad is thought to be linked to poor personal morality; however, it can differ from trait to trait. Recent research suggests that narcissism appears to have a more positive connection than the other two traits. Zuo et al. conducted an experiment involving Chinese adolescents from both middle and high schools, gathering data through Chinese version questionnaires. The investigation aimed to explore the connections between Dark Triad traits and two aspects of personal morality which are moral identity and prosocial behaviors. The distinct association between these two aspects can be due to differing cognitive and motivational processes. Given that narcissists seek external appraisals, like admiration and attention, this motivation could potentially drive them to behave ethically. The results showed that while Machiavellianism and psychopathy displayed negative links to moral identity and prosocial behavior, narcissism demonstrates positive correlations with both moral identity and prosocial behavior. Notably, this positive association was more pronounced in the group of people with low self-esteem. To sum up, the Dark Triad traits have distinct predictive impacts on an individual's morality. Among these traits, narcissism exhibited more favorable outcomes in terms of moral identity and prosocial behavior compared to Machiavellianism and psychopathy [6]. Therefore, the Dark Triad is an essential predictor of moral development. Although they are usually referred to as evil, their degrees are not the same. The feature of excessive self-importance of narcissism can drive them to do things that can help them to seek a sense of social identity. On the other hand, Machiavellianism and psychopathy are more thrill-driven and they are less affected by the external environment thus they are more likely to perform much worse on moral standards, but it is not saying that narcissism is completely positive on a prosocial level. Personality is highly associated with morality in adolescence. Positive personality traits such as agreeableness and empathy can enhance prosocial behavior whereas some negative counterparts like The Dark Triad traits can have adverse effects on moral engagement.

2.2. Callous-Unemotional Trait and Atypical Moral Development

Callous-unemotional (CU) is defined as a combination of personality characteristics that contribute to enduring forms of aggressive and antisocial conduct among adolescents. CU traits are likely to be associated with moral learning since they reflect one's personality. The intervention of CU traits helps children improve moral identity, which might contribute to a higher level of prosocial moral behaviors. Based on theoretical deduction, Bäker concluded that a deficiency in emotions stemming from specific personality traits indicates a deficit in prosocial behavior, which contributes to a rise in externalizing behavioral issues. In the study conducted, the result is consistent with what is expected, demonstrating that moral identity is correlated with moral emotion attribution in a reverse way, with callous-unemotional (CU) traits and behavioral problems that are expressed at two measurement times. Besides, CU traits exhibited the most robust and noteworthy correlations with all the variables considered. The longitudinal study observed ongoing changes in all the moral aspects under investigation. Adolescents were recruited as participants, and data was gathered at two different time points through online surveys. The adolescents' moral identity declined as time progressed, whereas externalizing behavior problems diminished with increasing age. Furthermore, heightened manifestations of certain personality traits, particularly those of CU traits, significantly affected the evolution of moral constructs and behavior [7]. Considering these findings, the positive intervention aimed at addressing the development of CU traits in adolescence is needed before they are too severe to change and therefore influence their moral identities.

Moral disengagement allows individuals to engage in unethical actions without displaying obvious feelings of guilt or self-censure and it functions as a cognitive mechanism, which is similar to moral justification and dehumanization. To be more specific, gossiping and stealing can be examples of moral disengagement in the workplace because of heavy workloads and frequently occurring interpersonal conflicts. It is likely to be interrelated with CU traits since they are both negative feedbacks of personality in moral expression. Muratori et al. carried out an investigation involving

adolescents diagnosed with disruptive behavior disorder in Italy to explore associations and potential interactions between cognitive aspects of moral engagement and CU traits. Each participant receives the moral disengagement scale as a tool to assess their inclination towards moral disengagement across various behaviors in different contexts and interpersonal relationships. Descriptive statistics and a latent variable framework were employed to analyze the result. As a result, they found that higher start scores in moral disengagement were linked to subsequently elevated potential in CU traits of adolescents. The main findings revealed that a) signs of moral disengagement at approximately the age of 14 predicted increased CU traits in the following year, even after accounting for potential fluctuations in these traits; b) the impact of moral disengagement on CU traits outweighed the reverse relationship. This trend aligns with the finding that heightened levels of moral disengagement were correlated with more serious manifestations of antisocial behaviors. The study's outcomes sustain a reciprocal relationship between moral disengagement and CU traits in a longitudinal way. Specifically, higher baseline levels of CU traits corresponded to a tendency for adolescents to experience increased moral disengagement in the next year [8]. CU traits mainly develop in adolescence; thus, adolescence is a critical period for personality formation and further for moral development. The positive association between moral disengagement and CU traits also confirms that persistent negative expression in adolescence can turn into antisocial behavior in the long term.

Wrongness of judgment is also a crucial aspect of morality. This cognitive moral aspect can be determined by an interaction of affective morality, anticipated guilt for example, and CU traits. Given that CU traits can significantly influence one's moral construct, adolescents with these traits are likely to feel less guilt toward transgressions. Vasconcelos and her colleagues aimed to explore the separation of moral behavior into two aspects, which is the distinction between the affective aspect, which can be seen in anticipated guilt, and the cognitive aspect, which is represented by wrongness judgments, observed among adults displaying elevated psychopathy levels, is also associated with CU traits throughout the developmental phase. They conducted an experiment involving typically developing male adolescents and encompassed some everyday harm-based moral transgressions depicted in animated cartoons. They used paired t-tests and linear mixed-effects models (LMMs) to identify the significance of differences between wrongness and guilt judgments and to explore the relationship between assessments of moral transgressions highlighting by anticipated guilt and moral wrongness, and CU traits, as well as the relationship between response times during these assessments and CU traits. These results demonstrated that a) more performance on CU traits predicted less guilt that the individual can feel and fewer wrongfulness judgments; b) Adolescents with lower CU trait levels rate significantly higher in wrongfulness as their ratings of anticipated guilt increased, a pattern not displayed in those with high CU traits; c) greater anticipated guilt levels were linked to shorter response time for making moral judgments [9]. Furthermore, CU traits did not play a mediator role in the connection between anticipated guilt and response times for making judgments regarding wrongness. In general, the study agreed that children who have elevated CU traits exhibit diminished emotional responsiveness, particularly towards others' distress, evident in their behavior, cognitive processes, and neural activity. Additionally, it demonstrated that adolescents with higher CU traits tend to perceive daily moral transgression as less immoral. These findings further support the notion that CU traits are strongly associated with emotional dysfunction and that these dysfunctions may be key in explaining moral issues in adolescents with elevated psychopathic traits.

These results indicate a negative correlation between CU traits and both affective and cognitive aspects of moral behavior. Adolescents diagnosed with CU traits can behave much more dangerously than normal adolescents because they regard a wrongful thing as less severe from their perspective. Callous-unemotional traits are a highlighted part of personality. It can significantly influence and predict the way adolescents express themselves to their environment, and this change which can promote antisocial behaviors can exist as they grow up. Moreover, CU traits also largely impact how we make everyday judgments on a moral level.

3. The Role of Environmental Factors

Childhood psychological maltreatment (CPM) is an outcome of repeatedly conveying to adolescents (children under 18) that they are worthless, unwanted, and unloved. As a result, it can lead to long-lasting cognitive and emotional damage in their development. This situation can cause moral deficiency such as moral disengagement as a result. Fang et al. discovered a noteworthy and positive connection between childhood psychological maltreatment and moral disengagement (MD), which was partly mediated by callous-unemotional (CU) traits, especially among individuals with low empathy. They believe that the CU trait serves as a coping strategy to adapt to challenging environments and might mediate the link between CPM and MD. The data of the study was collected through questionnaires. The research utilized techniques like data screening, mean imputation, descriptive statistics, and the PROCESS macro for SPSS plus the PROCESS macro to analyze the data. Results of the study showed that girls exhibited significantly fewer CU traits and higher levels of empathy than boys. Moreover, the findings indicated that a) CPM had a positive predictive relationship with MD; b) CPM linked positively to CU traits; and c) CU traits were positively associated with MD [10]. This supported the notion that CU traits play a mediating role in the connection between CPM and MD. To summarize, these outcomes suggest that empathy played a role in moderating links between CPM and MD indirectly through CU traits. Generally, individuals subjected to elevated levels of CPM tend to activate MD. However, questions about the underlying mechanisms, both in terms of mediation and moderation, in this association remain largely unanswered.

Thus, childhood psychological maltreatment is another factor that can lead to different moral development. Elevating the level of CPM is predictable for the emergence of moral disengagement, but the presence of CU traits is vital to mediate this effect if one's empathy is low to permit them to potentially make some immoral actions. Given that CU traits are linked with less correctness in moral judgment, it can be inferred that external factors like CPM can indirectly increase the probability of crime commitment. Personality traits such as moral disengagement also play an important role when it comes to external factors that can manipulate one's moral expression. Consistently denying and discouraging can lead to distorted growth of morality among adolescents as these can give rise to moral deficiency as a means of self-protection.

4. Conclusion

Personality traits such as The Dark Triad traits and the callous-unemotional traits can be powerful indicators of morality in adolescence. Negative disturbance in personality development can lead to many long-lasting problems like moral disengagement. However, many environmental factors, for example, childhood psychological maltreatment can also contribute to antisocial tendencies. There are some limitations in previous studies. The most notable one is that most of the studies collected their data by self-reporting through questionnaires or online surveys, which can be highly biased and subjective. Despite these limitations, the research findings provide people with the direction and insight into how to guide adolescents to correctly develop their moral awareness.

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