

# Moral Identity: Does it matter for civic action and entrepreneurial aspiration?

Tenelle Porter, Parissa Jahromi & William Damon

## Introduction

Moral identity is an important motivational construct that has been linked to helping behavior and moral emotions (Aquino & Reed, 2002; Hardy, 2006; Hardy & Claro, 2011). In light of these connections, we might expect moral identity to relate to civic action and career aspirations as well. Perhaps those with heightened moral identities pursue different types of civic activities and careers than those with less heightened moral identities. To investigate this possibility, the following studies describe the link between moral identity and civic action (study 1) and moral identity and entrepreneurial aspirations (study 2).

## Study 1

### Research Question

- How does moral identity relate to volunteering and political involvement among adolescents?

### Sample

- Public high school seniors from the Bay Area, Fresno and Pasadena, California
- $N = 1,578$
- Mean age = 17.4 (SD = .45)
- 48% male
- 46% Latino, 26% Asian, 5% Black, 6% White, 10% Mixed, 7% Other

### Measures

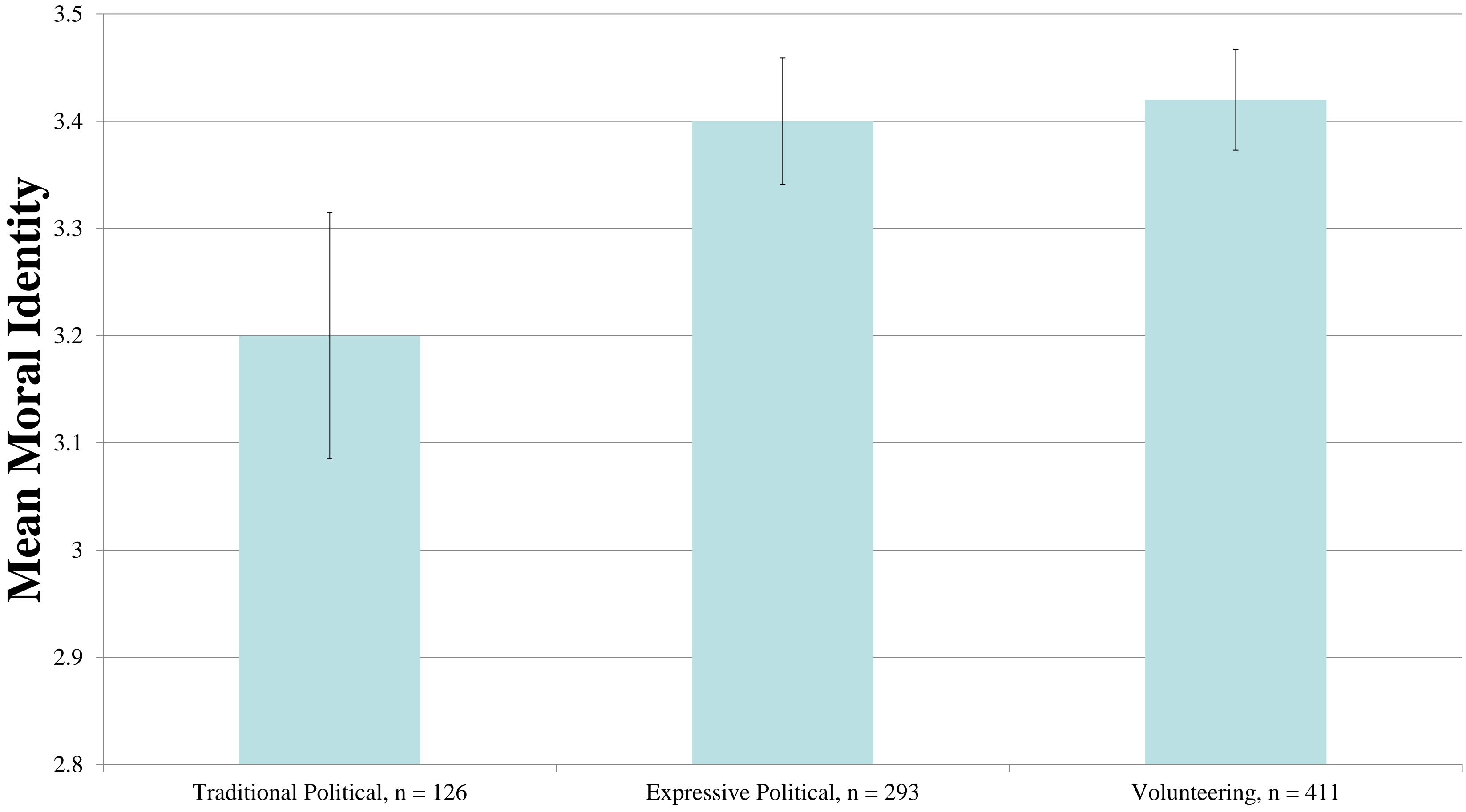
- Activity involvement: Youth Inventory of Involvement (Pancer et al., 2007)
  - Volunteering (2 items),  $\alpha = .81$
  - Traditional political (2 items),  $\alpha = .77$
  - Expressive political (3 items),  $\alpha = .64$
- Moral identity: Civic identity scale (Beaumont, Colby, Ehrlich, Torney-Purta, 2006)
  - Moral ID (6 items),  $\alpha = .79$

### Results

Mean moral ID for traditional political activists was significantly lower than mean moral ID for expressive political activists and active volunteers.

Holding sex, parent education, parent and peer civic involvement and school civic opportunities constant, moral ID was significantly positively related to expressive political action and volunteering, but not to traditional political action.

## Study 1: Moral Identity and Civic Involvement



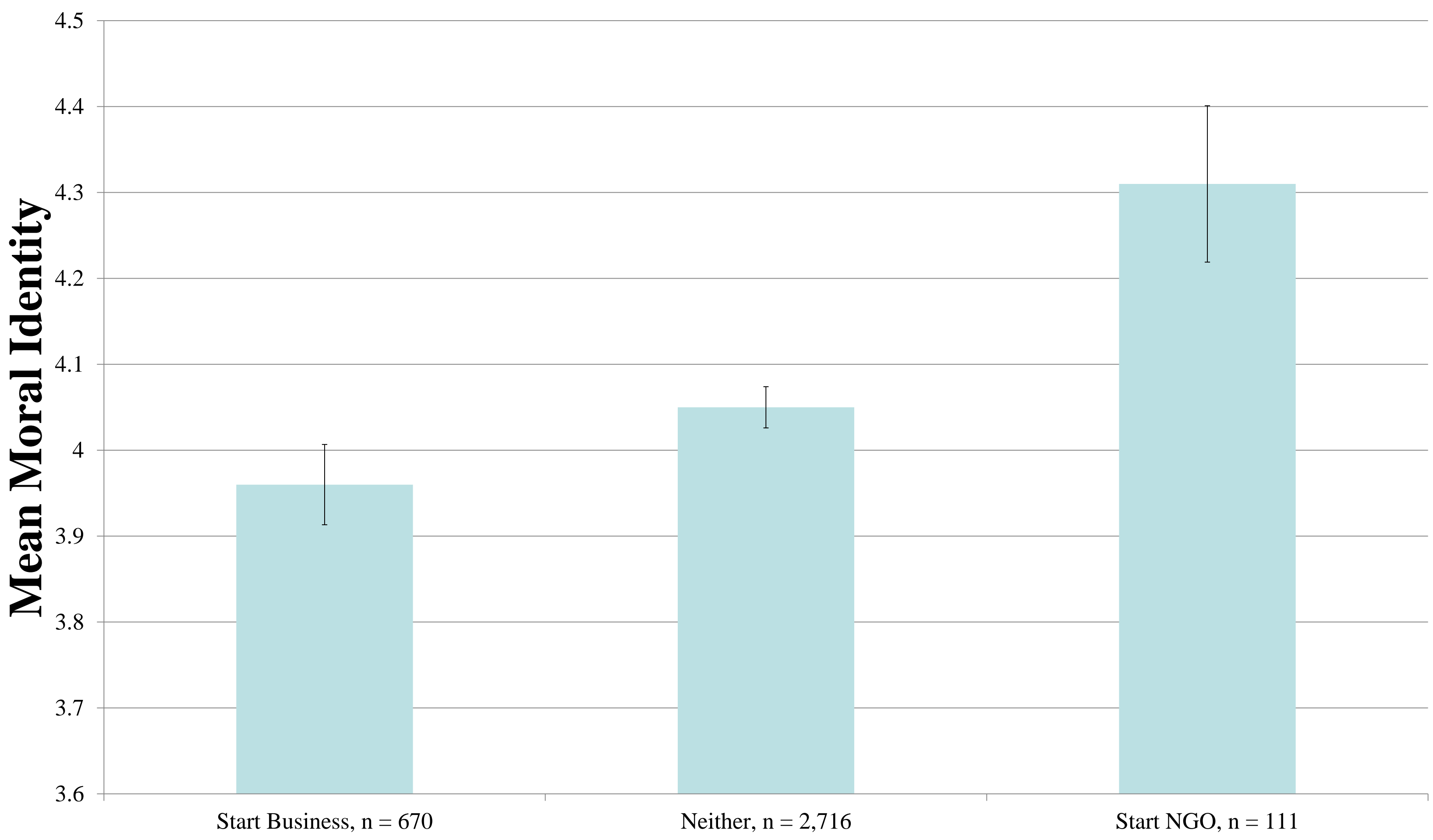
Mean difference between traditional political activists' moral ID and others' is significant at  $p < .05$ .

### Study 1 Regression Analyses

Regressing involvement on moral ID, holding sex, parent education, parent and peer civic involvement and school civic opportunities constant, moral ID was significantly related to expressive political action and volunteering,  $\beta = .15$ ,  $t(1424) = 5.80$ ,  $p < .000$  and  $\beta = .12$ ,  $t(1418) = 4.81$ ,  $p < .000$ , respectively.

Moral ID was not significantly related to traditional political action.

## Study 2: Moral Identity & Entrepreneurial Aspirations



Mean difference between business starters' moral ID and those who want to start a nonprofit (NGO) and those who aspire to neither is significant at  $p < .000$  and  $p < .001$ , respectively.

Mean difference between NGO starters' moral ID and others' is significant at  $p < .000$ .

### Study 2 Regression Analyses

Regressing entrepreneurial aspirations on moral ID, holding sex constant, moral ID was significantly related to aspiring to start a non-profit organization,  $\beta = .81$ ,  $SE = .17$ ,  $\text{Exp}(\beta) = 2.24$ ,  $p < .000$ . Moral ID was significantly, negatively related to aspiring to start a business,  $\beta = -.19$ ,  $SE = .07$ ,  $\text{Exp}(\beta) = .83$ ,  $p < .001$ .

## Study 2

### Research Question

- How does moral identity differentially relate to entrepreneurial aspirations?

### Sample

- College students from the East coast, Midwest and West coast, USA
- $N = 4,004$
- Mean age = 21.10 years, SD = 1.58
- 60% female
- 61% White, 16% East Asian, 5% Black, 6% Latino, 3% Asian Indian, 6% Mixed, 3% Other

### Measures

- Moral identity: Civic identity scale (Beaumont, Colby, Ehrlich, Torney-Purta, 2006)
  - Moral ID (6 items),  $\alpha = .74$
- Entrepreneurial aspirations
  - “Is starting a business your most important career goal?” (y/n)
  - “Is starting a nonprofit organization your most important career goal?” (y/n)

### Results

Mean moral ID of those who aspired to start a business was significantly lower than the moral ID of those who aspired to start an NGO and those who aspired to neither. Moral ID of those who aspired to start an NGO was significantly higher than others' moral ID.

Holding sex constant, moral ID was positively related to aspiring to start an NGO, but negatively related to aspiring to start a business.

### General Discussion

Studies 1 and 2 describe differences in moral identity for those with different civic activity profiles and those with different entrepreneurial aspirations. Findings are consistent with theory in that certain morally-charged activities and aspirations (e.g., starting a nonprofit) are strongly, positively related to moral identity. Further research is needed to examine the causal relationship between moral identity and these behaviors/aspirations. Questions also remain about why moral identity is not related to traditional political activity and why moral identity is negatively related to aspiring to start a business.