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ARTICLE



Links between moral identity and political purpose during emerging adulthood

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ABSTRACT


We examined the links between moral identity—the centrality of moral principles to identity—and political purpose during emerging adulthood. We analyzed data from two waves of a longitudinal study of civic purpose. T1 surveys were collected before high school graduation, and T2 surveys were collected 2 years later. We categorized people ($N = 1,578$ at T1 and $N = 480$ at T2) into political purpose groups based on the person-centered perspective and then performed a multinomial logistic regression analysis to test whether moral identity was associated with categories of political purpose. The findings from our study indicate that moral identity at T1 is linked with the maintenance and formation of T2 political purpose.

KEYWORDS

Political development; political purpose; moral identity; emerging adulthood; person-centered approach

Promoting political engagement among adolescents and young adults is an important task in democratic societies. Political engagement provides youth with the opportunity to develop skills and sets the stage for continued engagement later in life (Youniss et al., 2002). Evidence points to many contextual factors that support youth political engagement, for example, providing youth with high quality school-based civic opportunities (Michelsen, Zaff, & Hair, 2002; Zaff, Moore, Papillo, & Williams, 2003). Simultaneously, internal factors such as moral values and motivational and identity processes contribute to predicting some forms of volunteerism (Losier, Perreault, Koestner, & Vallerand, 2001; Yates & Youniss, 2010). However, relatively less is known about why young people become engaged in *political* activities and the role that morality plays in political development among adolescents. To outline the potential links between morality and political engagement, we first review prior literature about political engagement during the transition from adolescence to adulthood, political purpose and morality, and then argue for the need to understand how moral development might inform the development of political purpose.

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 Supplemental data for this article can be accessed [here](#).

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Low political engagement among adolescents and young adults

Political engagement, such as being involved in political campaigns or student government, provides youth with important opportunities to gain knowledge, skills and feelings of civic connectedness (Flanagan & Levine, 2010; Galston, 2001; Torney-Purta, Lehmann, Oswald, & Schulz, 2001). Unfortunately, many adolescents, particularly during the transitional period between late adolescence and early adulthood, do not sustain strong interest in or show intention to engage in political activities (Malin, Ballard, & Damon, 2015; Malin, Han, & Liauw, 2017; Snell, 2010; Syvertsen, Wray-Lake, Flanagan, Wayne Osgood, & Briddell, 2011). Adolescents are less likely to participate in traditional forms of political activities, such as running for student government and representing students at a city council or school board meeting, compared to expressive political activities, such as voicing opinions on social media (Ballard, Malin, Porter, Colby, & Damon, 2015; Malin et al., 2017; Porter, 2013), perhaps because they are provided with fewer opportunities to engage in traditional forms of political activities, such as voting (Shaub, 2012).

Many adolescents and young adults regard political activities as something detached from their everyday lives (Smith, Christoffersen, Davidson, & Herzog, 2011). In many cases, adolescents, particularly those from groups traditionally left out of political life, such as those from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds (Levinson, 2010), are likely to show cynicism about government and politics and consider political activities as disconnected from their own experiences (Bandura, 2006). In fact, disinterest in and disengagement from political activities are pervasive among adolescents and young adults (Snell, 2010). Snell (2010) reported that 59% of emerging adults interviewed identified as non-political. Although youth political engagement is important both as an avenue for positive youth development and for maintaining active democracies, political disengagement and cynicism among adolescents have become significant issues in modern society (Smith et al., 2011).

Political purpose

Recently, researchers have applied the framework of *purpose* for understanding youth political development. Purpose can be defined as ‘a stable and generalized intention to accomplish something that is at once meaningful to self and of consequence to the world beyond the self’ (Damon, Menon, & Bronk, 2003, p. 121). According to psychological studies, there are three components constituting purpose: long-term intention, engagement and beyond-the-self motivation (Damon, 2008; Han, 2015a, 2015b). First, a sustained intention to strive for a certain goal is required. Second, behavioral engagement in and commitment to relevant activities accompanied with concrete short-term action plans are necessary. Finally, such long-term intention and engagement should include pursuing the welfare of beyond-the-self entities, such as community and society, instead of self-oriented goals, such as success in one’s career or college entrance. A person should possess all three components to be fully purposeful (Damon, 2008; Han, 2015a). If we applied this definition to the case of political purpose, political purpose can be defined as possessing high civic and political intention, demonstrating strong political engagement and having beyond-the-self political motivation (Malin et al., 2015).

Researchers of purpose development have utilized qualitative methods and person-centered analysis to examine the developmental trajectory of purpose by focusing on

how people's sense of purpose changes over time (Damon, 2008; Damon et al., 2003; Malin, Reilly, Quinn, & Moran, 2014). Instead of quantitatively analyzing related variables, by employing qualitative methods, they were able to focus on which personal, environmental and socio-cultural factors influenced the participant's purpose based on context-rich interview data. Additionally, person-centered analysis allowed them to find common traits and personality patterns shared among purposeful participants. This person-centered approach enables researchers to better understand the influences of multiple factors on the differentiation of developmental trajectories (Bergman & Magnusson, 1997; Zeiders, Roosa, Knight, & Gonzales, 2013). In order to track changes in their purpose, they classified each participant into five different categories (drifting, dreamer, dabbler, self-oriented and purposeful), with three variables (intention, engagement and beyond-the-self motivation) (Damon, 2008). In addition, they examined which factors significantly contributed to purpose development for each individual participant based on the classification (Malin et al., 2014). The same classification method was applied in research in civic and political purpose development (see Table 1 for further details; Malin et al., 2017).

Applying the construct of purpose to the political domain provides the opportunity to integrate the dimensions of intentions, motivations and behavior related to political activities. In terms of political forms of purpose, previous research suggests that a small proportion of youth is found to have a political purpose (Malin et al., 2015; Snell, 2010), and political purpose declines across the developmental transition out of high school (Malin et al., 2017; Snell, 2010). Recent studies have reported that purposeful children and adolescents were more likely to sustain their engagement in political activities over time (Malin et al., 2015; Price-Mitchell, 2010; Quinn & Bauml, 2017) particularly compared with youth who frequently participated in political activities for self-oriented goals (Malin et al., 2017). Hence, long-term, sustained engagement in political activities might be bolstered by political purpose.

Moral identity

In our study, we use the construct of moral identity to capture the degree to which moral values, such as justice, fairness, compassion, honesty and care, are regarded as important to self-identity (Malin et al., 2015, 2017; Porter, 2013). According to Hardy's (2017) review, moral identity is about how moral values are central to the sense of self. Our approach is based on this conceptual definition of moral identity and follows others who have measured moral identity as the extent to which morality is regarded to be important and central to one's self-image (Aquino & Reed, 2002).

Table 1. Classification of political purpose status.

Political purpose category	Presence of civic intention	Presence of political engagement	Presence of beyond-the-self motivation
Drifting	No	No	-
Dreamer	Yes	No	-
Dabbler	No	Yes	-
Self-oriented	Yes	Yes	No
Purposeful in political activities	Yes	Yes	Yes

Psychological experiments have shown that moral identity is significantly associated with moral behavior (Aquino & Reed, 2002; Reed, Aquino, & Levy, 2007). In these studies, moral identity was measured by the Moral Identity Scale (MIS) asking participants whether morality-related characteristics (e.g., caring, compassionate) were important to symbolize who they are (symbolization) and internalize into their self-concept (internalization). They have demonstrated that strong centrality of moral principles and values to one's self-identity, measured as moral identity, significantly moderated the relationship between judgment and charitable behaviors and between judgment and participation in volunteering activities (Reed et al., 2007; Winterich, Aquino, Mittal, & Swartz, 2013). In addition, moral identity contributed to overcoming racial stereotypes when engaging in charitable behaviors (Freeman, Aquino, & McFerran, 2009) and prosocial actions in diverse business-related situations (Aquino, Freeman, Reed, Lim, & Felps, 2009). These findings suggest that moral identity moderates the relationship between moral judgment and moral behavior and is associated with prosocial behavior and judgments about others' behaviors. Furthermore, moral identity might also be related to participation in political activities, which is deemed to be closely associated with morality (Metzger & Smetana, 2009; Youniss & Yates, 1999). Related to eudaemonic well-being, Han, Liauw and Kuntz (2019) reported that moral identity contributes to the maintenance of one's meaning in life during emerging adulthood.

Within the context of political purpose and youth political engagement, moral identity is closely associated with political identity, which can be understood as being concerned about social, political and governmental issues, as well as political involvement (Porter, 2013). In other words, political identity is about whether political activities are an important way to identify oneself (Beaumont, Colby, Ehrlich, & Torney-Purta, 2006; Colby, Beaumont, Ehrlich, & Corngold, 2007). Although political identity and moral identity are closely associated with each other, engagement and interest in political activities are not always moral (Colby et al., 2007; Porter, 2013). Thus, it would be necessary to consider whether political identity plays a role in political and civic development independently from moral identity. Moreover, political identity is seemingly associated with political purpose given that political identity is about one's interest in political issues and involvement. Although these two constructs are highly related to each other (Porter, 2013), political purpose requires the presence of intention, engagement and beyond-the-self motivation (Damon, 2008; Malin et al., 2017), while political identity is mainly concerned with interest and concern.

Political purpose development and moral identity

There are many reasons to think that moral identity and politics are closely related. For example, in public discourse, people tend to make political choices and participate in political behaviors based on moral values (Hillygus & Shields, 2005; Kertzer, Powers, Rathbun, & Iyer, 2014). Political actions are often the behavioral enactment of moral values and judgments (Haidt & Graham, 2007). Furthermore, Haste and Hogan (2006) make an explicit argument that attending to the intersection of morality and politics is necessary to best understand and support youth civic development. They demonstrated that political engagement was often triggered by moral concerns, such as sense of responsibility, sensitivity to human rights, and social justice. Also, several conceptual

papers have underscored the connectivity between moral and political engagement (Yates & Youniss, 1996; Youniss & Yates, 1999). Thus, moral identity, or whether morality is considered to be centrally important to oneself, could influence and motivate one's political engagement.

Previous studies have shown that placing value on others above or instead of oneself is related to political behavior. For example, social responsibility founded on the moral values of care and justice instead of self-centered interests is positively associated with political engagement (Wray-Lake & Syvertsen, 2011). In addition, Syvertsen, Flanagan and Stout (2009) reported that students were more likely to engage in activities that were dangerous but contributed to the overall welfare of the school community when they valued the school community and solidarity more than self-interest. Moreover, various forms of political engagement contribute to the construction of values, self and identity during childhood and adolescence (Hardy, Pratt, Pancer, Olsen, & Lawford, 2011; Youniss, McLellan, & Yates, 1997).

However, the explicit role of moral identity in predicting political behaviors is relatively less studied, compared to the more general associations between value formation and civic engagement. Previous studies have reported mixed and limited outcomes. In a cross-sectional study drawing on the same data as our study, moral identity was positively correlated with traditional forms of political engagement (such as contacting a representative or contacting a newspaper to share opinions). However, in regression models, moral identity was negatively associated with such political activities while another form of identity, civic identity, showed positive association (Porter, 2013). One qualitative longitudinal study revealed a positive link between moral identity and political activity among highly active adolescents (Snell, 2010).

The current study

We examined the links between moral identity and political purpose during the transitional period of emerging adulthood. In the present study, we employed a person-centered perspective to categorize participants into political purpose categories and multinomial regressions to better understand the associations between moral identity and political purpose. Following the previous purpose development studies (Damon, 2008; Malin et al., 2014, 2017), we employed a person-centered approach that allowed us to focus on individual profiles associated with variables of interest and theory-driven categorization of participants to examine the transitions between different purpose statuses (see Table 1 for further details). We also aimed to examine which pattern of predictors, with particular interest in moral identity before high school graduation, was associated with political purpose during the following transition out of high school.

We extend previous work with the same data that analyzed cross-sectional associations between moral identity and political engagement (Porter, 2013) and political purpose development (Malin et al., 2015, 2017) by examining the relations between moral identity and the development of political purpose during the transition to adulthood with the person-centered approach. Although Porter (2013) examined the association between moral identity and political purpose-related variables, her study was cross-sectional, so it could not empirically test how moral identity influenced change in political purpose over time. Malin et al. (2015, 2017) conducted two-wave

data analyses to examine how civic and political purpose changed over time; however, they did not include moral identity in their analysis models. Hence, the present study builds on this previous work to examine whether moral identity influences change in political purpose.

In our study, it is necessary to examine the difference between political and moral identity in order to explore the unique role of each in positive youth development. Thus, we consider the unique role of moral identity after accounting for political identity.

We hypothesize that:

- (1) (a) Over time, people with political purpose have a stronger moral identity compared to people without political purpose and (b) moral identity is significantly correlated with components of political purpose.
- (2) T1 (first wave) moral identity positively predicts subsequent T2 (second wave) political purpose after accounting for political identity.

Method

Participants

Our study builds on the cross-sectional quantitative study based on Time 1 of the Civic Purpose Project, which found mixed associations between moral identity and different forms of civic engagement (Porter, 2013). We conducted analyses on two waves of surveys with a 2-year interval between the waves. The survey at the first time point (T1) was conducted in the fall of 2011. Participants were invited to complete the survey when they were starting their senior year of high school. Initially, the original dataset was collected from 1,578 participants (51.40% females, .82% undisclosed; 25.41% Asians, 5.39% African Americans, 45.82% Latino/a, 6.21% Caucasians, .32% Native Americans, 9.70% Multi-ethnicity, 6.46% Other ethnicity, .70% undisclosed) for the Civic Purpose Project (Malin et al., 2015, 2017; Porter, 2013). Two years later, participants were contacted to complete the same survey at the second time point (T2). At T2, 480 participants (59.79% females, 1.46% undisclosed; 33.96% Asians, 4.58% African Americans, 39.79% Latino/a, 6.04% Caucasians, 8.96% Multi-ethnicity, 5.21% Other ethnicity, 1.46% undisclosed) responded to the survey. The mean socioeconomic status (SES) among participants was 3.17 ($SD = 1.94$).

Figure 1 describes how many participants completed the required surveys during each time point as well as attrition in a flowchart. In this figure, we explained how many participants were included in the cross-sectional analyses each time and how many of them were included in the two-wave multinomial logistic regression analysis with brief descriptions about applied screening procedures.

Measures

Political purpose-related variables

We measured three variables (i.e., political activities, civic intention, beyond-the-self motivation) to assess each participant's political purpose.

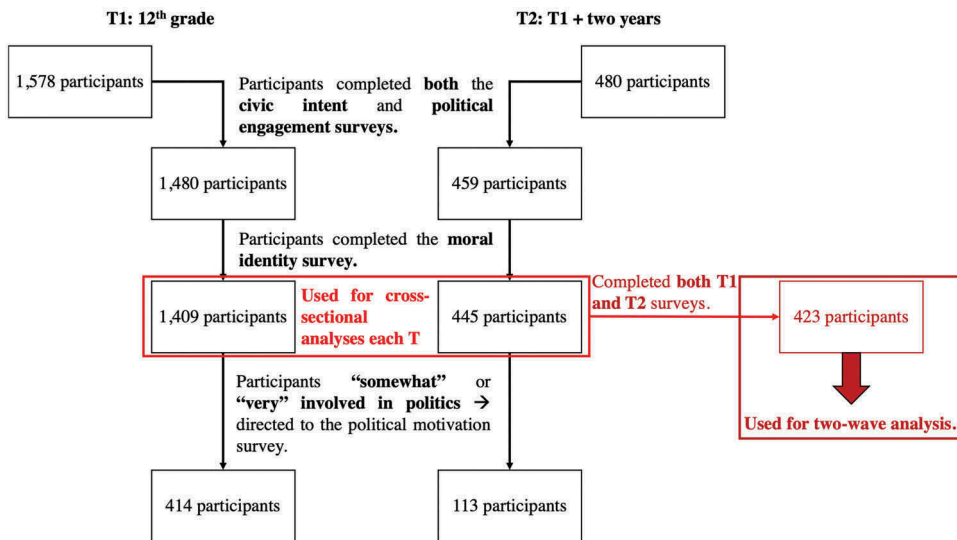


Figure 1. Flowchart describing how many participants were included in cross-sectional and two-wave analyses.

Political activities. We measured participants' engagement in political activities using six items. These items were extracted from the Youth Inventory of Involvement (Pancer, Pratt, Hunsberger, & Alisat, 2007) and adapted for the civic purpose survey (Malin et al., 2017). Participants rated the frequency of their engagement in traditional political activities since starting high school on a 4-point scale (never, once or twice, a few times and regularly). Then, we calculated the average score of the responses to six items (e.g., 'Held a leadership position in a school club,' 'attended a protest march, meeting or demonstration,' 'ran for a position in student government' (see supplementary materials for other items)). Internal consistency was acceptable at both T1, $\alpha = .71$, and T2, $\alpha = .79$.

Given that the items in this scale assessed engagement in diverse forms of traditional political activities, whether the items measured one factor, political engagement, should be examined. To address this issue, we performed Principal Component Analysis (PCA) and one factor was extracted (see supplementary methods for further details). This result would suggest that the political engagement we measured could be considered one factor.

Civic intention. We measured participants' intention to engage in future civic activities with a five-item scale developed for civic purpose studies (Malin et al., 2017). The scale asked the participants whether civic activities were perceived to be meaningful to their life goals. Their answers were anchored on a 5-point Likert scale (not at all meaningful to extremely meaningful). The civic intention score was then calculated by averaging scores of the five items (e.g., 'Being involved in politics,' 'making a difference through volunteering,' 'becoming a leader in my community' (see supplementary materials for other items)). Internal consistency demonstrated acceptable reliability for T1 ($\alpha = .77$) and good for T2 ($\alpha = .81$).

Given that the items in this scale assessed intent to participate in diverse forms of civic activities (i.e., political, community service and expressive activities), whether the items measured one factor, civic intention, should be examined. As we did with political engagement, in order to address this issue, we performed PCA and one factor was extracted (see supplementary methods for further details). This result suggests that civic intention could be considered one factor.

Beyond-the-self motivation. To examine whether participants who engaged in political activities had beyond-the-self motivation, we used an inventory consisting of 12 value-related items associated with political motivation (Malin et al., 2015, 2017). Before directing participants to the political motivation measure, we measured their overall political involvement with one question, ‘How involved in political activities are you?’ Their answers were anchored on a 4-point Likert scale (‘not involved in political activities and don’t want to get involved in next 6 months’—‘very involved in political activities’). If one was somewhat or very involved in political activities, then the participant was directed to the political motivation measure. If not, then the participant was directed to the political barrier measure that assessed barriers to political engagement. Thus, we assessed the presence of beyond-the-self motivation only among participants who completed the political motivation measure (who reported being politically active) given the structure of the survey and following the classification method used in the previous studies.

We asked the participants to select and rank the top three items, which were considered as the most important reasons why they decided to engage in political activities, out of 12 items (e.g., ‘To do something about an issue I care about,’ ‘I wanted to take action on my beliefs,’ ‘it is important for my religious/ethnic/cultural group’ (see supplementary materials for other items)). Each participant was classified as self-oriented (0) or possessing beyond-the-self motivation (1) according to the response. If at least one of the aforementioned six items was selected as the most important one, this case was regarded as possessing beyond-the-self motivation (1). In other cases, participants were deemed as not possessing beyond-the-self motivation (0). We used this resultant binary variable for further analyses. The scoring scheme was developed by the previous studies by cross-validating results from the quantitative beyond-the-self motivation measures and individual interviews (Malin et al., 2017).

Moral identity

We measured whether moral values were regarded as important to participants’ self-identity (Colby et al., 2007; Porter, 2013). Participants were presented with six items associated with morality (e.g., ‘being fair,’ ‘honest,’ ‘willing to stand up for what I believe is right’ (see supplementary materials for other items)). Then, they were asked to rate how central each value was to their identity. Their answers were anchored on a 4-point Likert scale (Not at all central to my identity—Somewhat central to my identity—Quite Central to my identity—Very central to my identity). Each participant’s moral identity score was calculated by averaging responses to the six items. Internal consistency was acceptable for T1 ($\alpha = .75$) and good for T2 ($\alpha = .83$).

In our study, although we did not use the MIS (developed by Aquino and Reed (2002)) that has been widely used in the field, we assumed that our explicit measure of

moral identity was credible given that Hertz and Krettenauer's (2016) meta-analysis reported that various explicit measures of moral identity performed well in general.

Political identity

Similar to moral identity, we measured whether political concerns are fundamental to one's self-identity (Colby et al., 2007; Porter, 2013). Participants were presented with three items associated with political concerns (i.e., 'concerned about international issues,' 'politically involved,' 'concerned about government decisions and policies'). Then, participants were asked to rate how central each value was to their identity and we calculated the average score. Internal consistency was acceptable for T1 ($\alpha = .74$) and good for T2 ($\alpha = .80$).

Demographics

We collected demographic data of participants including gender, ethnicity, birthplace, father's and mother's birthplace, SES, and whether they were college-bound at T2 as covariates following the previous longitudinal study conducted by Malin et al. (2017). Gender (male vs. female), birthplace (born in the US vs. born out of the US) and college-bound at T2 (bound vs. unbound) were treated as binary variables. We treated ethnicity (Asian, African American, Latino/a, Caucasian, multi-ethnicity, or other), and father's and mother's birthplace (born in the US, born out of the US, or unknown) as categorical variables. We asked participants to select the most appropriate answer for each question regarding ethnicity and birthplace variables. We used the MacArthur Scale of Subjective Social Status as an indicator for SES (Adler, Epel, Castellazzo, & Ickovics, 2000). Participants were presented with an image of a ladder and then asked to locate their relative position based on their family's assets, educational background and occupations. Participants' SES was treated as a continuous variable (first = lowest to ninth decile = highest).

Procedure

For the Civic Purpose Project, 12th graders from seven high schools located in Northern, Southern and Central California at T1 were recruited. They were asked to complete the survey forms online using Qualtrics in a computer lab at the high schools. Two years after T1, participants were contacted again via email. The participants completed the T2 survey forms via Qualtrics. We used the same survey forms at both T1 and T2.

Statistical analyses

We examined civic intention and political engagement to implement a person-centered approach that examines the components of participants' political purpose (Zeiders et al., 2013). Following the method used in the previous civic purpose study, we classified each participant according to their civic purpose profile (Malin et al., 2017). The theoretical classification process used to determine political purpose status is presented in Table 2.

Before testing our hypotheses, we examined different aspects of attrition. We were particularly concerned about whether there were any differences in variables of interest

Table 2. Theoretical classification of political purpose. Three political purpose variables, civic intention, political engagement, and beyond-the-self (BTS) motivation, were used.

	Civic intention: 4 (meaningful) or 5 (extremely meaningful)?	Political engagement: top quartile among participants?	(Political motivation question) BTS motivation: Selected?
Drifting	No	No	–
Dreamer	Yes	No	–
Dabbler	No	Yes	–
Self-oriented	Yes	Yes	No
Purposeful in political activities	Yes	Yes	Yes

between participants who did and did not complete the T2 survey. Thus, we compared T1 political purpose status, political and moral identity between the participants who completed the T2 survey versus those who did not (see supplementary results for further details). There was no significant difference in T1 political identity between the two groups. Although we found significant differences in T1 political purpose status and moral identity between the two groups, the calculated effect sizes were small.

To test our hypotheses, first, we examined descriptive statistics of variables of interest through one-way ANOVA. Post-hoc tests were performed using Scheffe's method to test whether there were significant differences in civic intention, political engagement, beyond-the-self motivation and moral identity between five purpose categories. These post-hoc tests were performed to test Hypothesis 1a. Correlational analyses were conducted to test Hypothesis 1b.

Second, we conducted multinomial logistic regression analysis to investigate whether moral identity significantly contributed to the formation of political purpose over time (Fay et al., 2009; Liang, Xu, Bennett, Ye, & Quinones, 2010). To find the best regression model, we performed the multinomial logistic regression with three different models. First, we set T2 political purpose type as a dependent variable and entered only demographic variables into the model (Model 1). Second, we added T1 political purpose status to Model 1 (Model 2). Third, we added identity-related variables, T1 moral and political identity, as main effects to Model 2 following Porter's (2013) previous study (Model 3). We compared Pseudo R^2 values, which are similar to R^2 in linear regression analysis, and conducted LR X^2 test, which is a likelihood-ratio test that examines whether adding independent variables significantly contributes to the improvement of the goodness of fit of the model and determines which model was the best. The analyses excluded listwise cases where data were missing at T2.

Our statistical analyses were performed with STATA 14. We created a figure showing transitions between political purpose statuses across time with a customized R script. All related source codes are available via Open Science Framework (<https://osf.io/zb7um/>).

Results

Descriptive statistics and correlational analysis

A one-way analysis of variance showed that each political purpose-related variable at T1 for the five political purpose statuses at T1 significantly varied, $F(4, 1475) = 508.60$, $p < .001$ ($\omega^2 = .58$) for civic intention, $F(4, 1475) = 906.76$, $p < .001$ ($\omega^2 = .71$) for

political engagement, $F(4, 384) = 48.67$, $p < .001$ ($\omega^2 = .33$) for beyond-the-self motivation and $F(4, 1404) = 61.34$, $p < .001$ ($\omega^2 = .15$) for moral identity. Furthermore, we found significant between-group differences in T2 civic intention, $F(4, 454) = 146.46$, $p < .001$ ($\omega^2 = .56$), political engagement, $F(4, 454) = 280.52$, $p < .001$ ($\omega^2 = .71$), beyond-the-self motivation, $F(4, 102) = 16.71$, $p < .001$ ($\omega^2 = .37$) and moral identity, $F(4, 441) = 17.01$, $p < .001$ ($\omega^2 = .13$).

Based on the ANOVA, we performed post-hoc tests to test Hypothesis 1a that within time, people with political purpose have a stronger moral identity compared to people without political purpose. Scheffe's post-hoc analyses showed that moral identity was significantly higher among participants that were self-oriented and purposeful in political activities compared with the rest at T1. At T2, moral identity was significantly higher among dreamers and participants purposeful in political activities compared with the rest. These results partially support Hypothesis 1a.

To test hypothesis 1b, that moral identity is significantly correlated with components of political purpose, we conducted Pearson correlation analysis examining the relationships between political purpose-related variables and moral identity at T1 and T2. At both T1 and T2, moral identity was significantly correlated ($p < .05$) with all political purpose variables, civic intention, political engagement and beyond-the-self motivation, at the same time point (see Table 3). These findings support Hypothesis 1b.

Multinomial regression analysis

To test hypothesis 2, that T1 moral identity positively predicts subsequent political purpose after accounting for political identity, we performed multinomial logistic regression analysis. This allowed us to examine whether the strength of T1 moral identity significantly contributed to the differential classification of participants at T2 in terms of their political purpose statuses (e.g., becoming drifting vs. purposeful in political activities at T2). The likelihood of being classified as a specific political purpose status at T2 predicted by the T1 moral identity score was quantified in the form of the relative risk ratio¹.

The three-step hierarchical regression analysis was conducted to test whether the addition of the T1 moral identity variable significantly improved the regression model. Tables S1 and S2 demonstrate the results of multinomial regression analysis for Model 1 and Model 2, respectively. Table 4 shows the result of the complete regression model with T1 moral and political identity (Model 3) (see Table S3 for the full result).

Table 3. Correlation matrix among political purpose-related variables and moral identity.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. T1 Civic intention	–						
2. T2 Civic intention	.52***	–					
3. T1 Political engagement	.42***	.33***	–				
4. T2 Political engagement	.24***	.38***	.46***	–			
5. T1 BTS motivation	.15**	.20*	.19*	.12	–		
6. T2 BTS motivation	.01	.09	.04	–.02	–.03	–	
7. T1 Moral identity	.46***	.35***	.29***	.22***	.16*	.16†	–
8. T2 Moral identity	.30***	.45***	.22***	.10*	.08	.23*	.41***

For correlations with beyond-the-self (BTS) motivation, data collected from the participants who completed the political motivation measure ($N = 113$) were analyzed. † $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Table 4. Result from multinomial regression analysis with Model 3.

	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>RRR</i>	<i>z</i>	[95% Conf. Interval]
T2 Drifting					
T1 Political purpose (ref: PPA)					
Drifting	2.52	.91	12.43	2.76**	.73 4.30
Dreamer	.98	.89	2.66	1.10	-.76 2.72
Dabbler	.77	1.00	2.16	.77	-1.20 2.74
Self-oriented	.96	.85	2.62	1.13	-.71 2.64
T1 Moral identity	-1.78	.72	.17	-2.47*	-3.19 -.36
T1 Political identity	-1.11	.41	.33	-2.68**	-1.92 -.30
T2 Dreamer					
T1 Political purpose (ref: PPA)					
Drifting	.67	.88	1.95	.76	-1.05 2.38
Dreamer	1.28	.80	3.59	1.59	-.30 2.85
Dabbler	-.19	.98	.83	-.20	-2.10 1.72
Self-oriented	.26	.78	1.29	.33	-1.28 1.79
T1 Moral identity	-1.69	.74	.19	-2.29*	-3.13 -.24
T1 Political identity	-.36	.42	.70	-.85	-1.18 .46
T2 Dabbler					
T1 Political purpose (ref: PPA)					
Drifting	.16	1.07	1.18	.15	-1.93 2.25
Dreamer	-.21	1.07	.81	-.20	-2.30 1.88
Dabbler	.88	1.09	2.41	.81	-1.25 3.01
Self-oriented	.75	.96	2.11	.78	-1.13 2.62
T1 Moral identity	-1.81	.81	.16	-2.24*	-3.39 -.23
T1 Political identity	-1.05	.48	.35	-2.17*	-2.00 -.10
T2 Self-oriented					
T1 Political purpose (ref: PPA)					
Drifting	-.98	1.00	.38	-.98	-2.93 .98
Dreamer	-1.96	1.10	.14	-1.79	-4.11 .19
Dabbler	-1.38	1.10	.25	-1.26	-3.53 .77
Self-oriented	-.48	.83	.62	-.58	-2.10 1.14
T1 Moral identity	-1.29	.87	.27	-1.49	-3.00 .41
T1 Political identity	-.84	.49	.43	-1.72	-1.80 .11

T2 reference group is purposeful in political activities (PPA). Results from demographical variables were excluded for brevity. See Table S3 for the full results with demographic independent variables. Pseudo $R^2 = .23$, Model $\chi^2(76) = 220.45$, $p < .001$. *RRR*: relative risk ratio (i.e., $\exp(B)$). * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Given the results of LR χ^2 test and Pseudo R^2 values, Model 3 was indicated as the best model; the test results and R^2 values increased monotonically as additional independent variables were added to the model. In the case of Model 1, the result of LR χ^2 test result was significant, $\chi^2(52) = 74.73$, $p < .05$, and the calculated pseudo R^2 was .07. In the case of Model 2, the LR χ^2 test result remained significant, $\chi^2(68) = 193.08$, $p < .001$, and pseudo R^2 increased to .20, $\Delta R^2 = .12$. Finally, in the case of Model 3, the LR χ^2 test result remained significant and pseudo R^2 increased by .03 as presented in the note of Table 4. The results of LR tests indicated that Model 3 was significantly better than Model 1, $\chi^2(24) = 118.57$, $p < .001$, and Model 2, $\chi^2(8) = 22.88$, $p < .01$. Both moral identity, $\chi^2(4) = 10.23$, $p < .05$, and political identity, $\chi^2(4) = 17.32$, $p < .01$, significantly contributed to the model fit improvement. Moral identity contributed to the increase of pseudo R^2 independently of political identity (see supplementary results for further details).

The findings indicated that presence of strong moral identity at T1 significantly predicted a lower likelihood of being categorized as drifters, dreamers and dabbles relative to purposeful in political activities at T2 even after controlling for T1 political identity. Thus, evidence partially supported Hypothesis 2. For all T2 political purpose

statuses except self-oriented ($p = .16$), the relative risk ratios of moral identity at T1 were significantly smaller than one. The non-significant differences in T2 self-oriented group might be due to the relatively small portion of purposeful in political activities participants, 145 at T1 and 36 at T2. All reported relative risk ratios indicate a medium to large effect size (Ferguson, 2009). For further details regarding transitions among statuses, refer to Table S4 in supplementary materials.

Discussion

We examined whether moral identity was significantly associated with the formation and maintenance of political purpose during the transitional period between late adolescence and early adulthood. The findings are in line with previous studies of political engagement among youth that the formation and expression of moral identity is important in political engagement (Haste & Hogan, 2006; Yates & Youniss, 1996; Youniss & Yates, 1999). Also, the findings support previous work which found that strong moral identity was pervasive among politically active young adults with interviews with quantitative evidence (Snell, 2010). As expected, moral identity was significantly associated with political purpose variables at both time points in the present study.

Moral identity became a significant buffering factor for the longitudinal change in political purpose. Unlike previous longitudinal studies that did not include moral identity in analyses (Malin et al., 2015, 2017), we focused on the influence of moral identity on the development of political purpose in addition to intention, engagement and beyond-the-self motivation. As political actions often involve moral values and moral judgment (Haidt & Graham, 2007), the effect of moral identity is an important factor in predicting political purpose development. Given the connectedness of political activities and moral identity in terms of developmental theory as well as behavior in the public domain (Hillygus & Shields, 2005; Kertzer et al., 2014; Yates & Youniss, 1996; Youniss & Yates, 1999), the presence of moral identity might promote purpose in traditional political activities over the transitional period into young adulthood. The present findings suggest that adolescents with moral identity might consider political activities important to whom they are and be more likely to maintain their political purpose.

Interestingly, moral identity was still significantly and strongly influential even though political identity was included in the model. Moral identity influenced transitions to all political purpose statuses except for a transition to dreamer and self-oriented participants at T2. However, T1 political identity had small or moderate effects on T2 purpose (Ferguson, 2009), which were weaker compared with associations between moral identity and T2 political purpose. Although the presence of political identity without moral identity might be significantly associated with political engagement at a specific moment as shown by Porter's (2013) cross-sectional study, moral identity perhaps plays a significant role in the longitudinal maintenance and formation of political purpose. Indeed, previous work has underscored that concerns about moral values and issues are inseparable from political engagement (Annette, 2005; Colby et al., 2007). A qualitative study has shown that such moral concerns significantly motivated people to engage in diverse political activities (Manning, 2013).

Moreover, in our auxiliary analysis (see Table S3 for further details), we found that female participants were less likely to become a T2 dabbler compared with male

participants. In a previous study that focused on gender differences in moral motivation and political engagement, researchers reported that female participants showed significantly stronger civic intention and political engagement compared with male participants. Our finding would be consistent with this previous study given that female participants were more likely to maintain political engagement with strong civic intention (T2 purposeful in political activities) while male participants were relatively more likely to show mere engagement in political activities without such strong civic intention (T2 dabbler).

These findings have implications for theory and practice. In terms of refining the model of political purpose, these findings point to the importance of morality as an important dimension for political purpose. In addition, these findings add evidence to literature linking identity development to political development. In the many theoretical arguments connecting civic engagement with identity development, the direction is primarily framed as civic engagement affecting identity development (e.g., Youniss et al., 1997), and the evidence base delineating the exact nature of links between various domains of identity and civic development is sparse. We examined how identity affects civic development and the main finding that moral identity predicts political purpose supplements previous work which found that identity statuses and processes are associated with civic engagement (Crocetti, Jahromi, & Meeus, 2012; Hardy et al., 2011; Pancer et al., 2007). Our findings especially align with the findings of Crocetti et al. (2012) that identity status predicted political forms of civic engagement mediated by social responsibility.

We may also consider how moral identity influences the change and development of political purpose later in adulthood although this might be out of the scope of our study. Previous studies that examined civic and political engagement among older adults showed that they were more likely to participate in civic and political activities based on their psychological and social reasons rather than instrumental reasons, which were more valued among younger adults (Ballard, Pavlova, Silbereisen, & Damon, 2015; Hirshorn & Settersten, 2013; Kruse & Schmitt, 2015). In addition, identities in civic and political domains that are formed during early adulthood are highly predictive of civic and political disposition in late adulthood (Flanagan & Levine, 2010). Hence, the association between moral identity and political purpose would also be significant later in adulthood.

In practical terms, these findings suggest that a productive way to encourage youth pursuing active political trajectories might be through moral development. Helping young people clarify their own moral values and integrate their moral values with their developing identities might spur the formation of political forms of civic purpose. To achieve this aim, educators may get some useful inspiration from educational programs like Kohlberg's just community approach that encourages meaningful participation and civic engagement in a democratic school environment. Given that such approaches attempt to integrate moral and democratic values within the context of educational activities and encourage students to internalize such values (Oser, Althof, & Higgins-D'Alessandro, 2008), they are perhaps viable methods to promote political engagement through moral education.

Limitations

Although this set of analyses establishes moral identity as an important dimension to predicting political purpose at the transition from adolescence to young adulthood,

there are some limitations that should be noted. First, because we only analyzed the two-wave data, we were not able to conduct more sophisticated statistical analyses, such as latent growth curve analysis, to examine long-term developmental trends. Second, a significant portion of the participants did not complete T2 survey, so the attrition rate was high. This issue may limit the generalizability of the findings. Although such a high rate of attrition is a common concern across developmental studies, particularly those focusing on the transitional period (e.g., Ballard, 2016), future studies for replication are necessary. Third, we used the domain-general civic intention measure instead of a measure to assess political intention to maintain the methodological consistency with the previous study. Although our supplementary PCA demonstrated that the measured civic intention could be considered as one factor, the use of domain-general civic intention measure might limit the conceptual congruence between the constructs of civic intention and political engagement that were measured in our study. Fourth, beyond-the-self motivation was assessed only among politically active participants since the political motivation measure was presented only to them following the classification method. We did so because it would be unnatural to ask about motivation to engage in political activities to politically inactivate participants.

Conclusion

The development of moral identity and political engagement are intertwined during adolescence as well as emerging adulthood. Our study demonstrated that moral identity in late adolescence is an important factor in predicting sustained political purpose, purpose to engage in political activities, even after considering T1 political purpose status and political identity. The findings suggest that moral identity development significantly affects political purpose development during the transitional period of emerging adulthood.

Note

1. For example, the relative risk ratio of T1 moral identity among T2 drifting participants, .17 (Table 4), is smaller than 1.0. This indicates that high moral identity at T1 is associated with the lower likelihood of being categorized as 'drifting' at T2 compared with that of being categorized as 'purposeful in political activities' at T2, which was used as the reference group in our analyses. In other words, students who have higher moral identity score at T1 tend to belong to the purposeful in political activities group compared to the drifting group at T2. More specifically, it means that if a participant's T1 moral identity increased by one unit, the relative risk for becoming T2 drifting versus becoming T2 purposeful in political activities would be expected to decrease by a factor of .17 given the other variables in the model are held constant.

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