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# Lay Theories of Morality in the Lives of Moral Exemplars

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# **Lay Theories of Morality in the Lives of Moral Exemplars**

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University of Connecticut, 2016

Psychological research on moral exemplars presents them as near perfect, focusing on their impeccable character and accomplishments. However, just like anybody else, they also have imperfections that are usually unrecognized by psychological research. The aim of this dissertation is to examine the implications of studying moral exemplars as if they are perfect. I will argue that focusing only on the positive qualities of moral exemplars, and ignoring the important ways that failures may have contributed to their development, imply an entity theory of morality where only certain perfect people possess unchangeable moral traits. In Chapter I, I provide an overview of psychological research on morality and moral exemplars, showing how they imply an entity theory of morality, and explore the potential consequences of this implication. In Chapter II, I present the results of series of studies that examine how individual react when they find out about the failures of their moral exemplars. Throughout six experiments, the results show that whereas finding out about the failure of a moral exemplar undermines them as a moral model, participants are inspired by the moral exemplar if the failure leads to growth and learning. In Chapter III, I propose four studies that aim to demonstrate that imperfect exemplars may also be important in applied educational settings. Specifically, I propose using imperfect exemplars in a sexual assault prevention leadership training program, arguing that imperfect exemplars may be particularly inspiring for participants who confront their past failures.

**Lay Theories of Morality in the Lives of Moral Exemplars**

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Doctor of Philosophy Dissertation

Lay Theories of Morality in the Lives of Moral Exemplars

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## Chapter I

### **Lay Theories of Morality in the Lives of Moral Exemplars**

Moral exemplars, by definition, serve as an example for the moral life of individuals. Their extraordinary commitment to morality, often at great personal cost, serves as an inspiration that shows it is possible to live a moral life. While the lives of famous exemplars such as Martin Luther King or Mother Theresa have been an important part of popular discourse for a long time, only recently have the lives of moral exemplars become an explicit topic of study by psychologists. As more researchers recognize the central role of morality in almost every aspect of human life, the study of those who serve as an example in this domain become increasingly important. After all, if we can understand the few who have demonstrated moral excellence in their lives, we can enable others to follow suit. Finding ways to cultivate honest business leaders, for example, may have profound ramifications for society. Thus, understanding the psychology of moral exemplars has gained increased importance for researchers.

As researchers seek to understand exemplars, how exactly they conceptualize the moral character of exemplars become particularly important. For example, if the moral character of exemplars is viewed as a fixed, unchangeable property possessed by certain special individuals, interventions may be developed to identify these individuals. In contrast, if moral character is viewed as something that can be developed over time by anybody, interventions may focus on cultivating good character in the general populace. Thus, the conceptualization of the moral lives of exemplars may play an important role in various aspects of society.

The aim of this chapter is to argue that a majority of research on moral exemplars, as well as morality more generally, implies an entity theory of morality, suggesting that moral character is a fixed trait possessed by certain individuals. I will be arguing that by emphasizing how

certain moral properties are possessed by individuals at a given time, researchers, possibly unintentionally, are implying an entity theory of morality. I will not argue that the researchers are explicitly, intentionally proposing an entity theory of morality. Rather, I will argue that the emphasis of the research subtly suggests an entity theory of morality.

This chapter has three sections. First, I will describe research on lay theories of the self, discuss the relevance of entity and incremental theories of morality, showing how they have been important for understanding motivation in a variety of domains. I will argue that they should be given more importance in the study of morality. Second, I will examine some of the prominent theories in moral psychology, investigating whether particular lay theories of the moral self are suggested by these approaches to morality. Third, I will examine the most prominent research on moral exemplars, examining whether they suggest particular lay theories about the changeability of moral character. I will also discuss the potential implications of emphasizing a particular lay theory of morality.

## **I. Lay Theories**

Even though the importance of lay theories of the self has been demonstrated in a variety of domains such as emotion regulation, self-esteem, and intergroup relations, they have been most extensively applied in the domain of academic motivations. According to Dweck and Leggett (1988), individuals' basic assumptions about changeability in a given domain, such as academic achievement, create an interpretive framework through which events in this domain are understood and responded to. Depending on the interpretive framework that people have, a given event might hold very different meanings from person to person. For example, individuals who have an 'entity' theory of intelligence see intelligence as a fixed attribute that cannot be changed. Dweck and Leggett (1988) argued that in the academic domain, an entity theory of intelligence profoundly affects motivation. If intelligence is an innate characteristic that cannot be altered –

neither increased nor decreased -- there is no use trying to improve it. Thus, when faced with an academic failure that might suggest low intelligence, putting further effort into one's studies may appear futile. As it is not possible to improve one's intelligence, an entity theorist who fails to demonstrate his or her intelligence is less motivated to do well in the future. In contrast, an academic success demonstrates one's innate intelligence. As one's intelligence is already proven, one has less reason to be motivated to succeed academically. The task is already completed -- there is no more motivation to continue to work hard.

In contrast to an entity theory, holding an 'incremental theory, which views intelligence as changeable, has the opposite effects on motivation. When faced with academic failure, the cause might be seen as a lack of effort rather than as having inadequate innate intelligence. Since it is thought to be possible to improve one's intelligence through effort, failure can be seen as an opportunity to *improve* one's performance. Similarly, as success is dependent on continued effort, success does not undermine continued motivation for an incremental theorist -- the task will never be fully completed. From an incremental theory perspective, both success and failure should lead to increased motivation for better performance because both success and failure are interpreted as resulting from effort rather than innate ability.

Researchers have found plenty of support for these arguments in the academic domain. For example, in one study, researchers found that participants who endorsed incremental theories of intelligence were also more likely to endorse effort attributions for their intelligence (Hong et al., 1999, Study 1). In another study, researchers asked participants who had learned English as a second language and were having difficulties if they would be interested in signing up for remedial courses. As expected, entity theorists were less likely to request assistance, whereas incremental theorists were motivated to seek the extra help that they needed to improve their English (Hong et al., 1999, Study 2).



Although most research on lay theories has been conducted in the academic domain, lay theories may also play an important role in the moral domain. In fact, some evidence is accumulating that they play an important role in moral judgments: having an entity theory of moral character leads to stronger negative reactions to moral transgressions, perhaps because the behavior is perceived to be caused by a stable, unchangeable source. For example, Miller, Burgoon and Hall (2007) manipulated participants' lay theory of morality by having them read an article espousing an incremental or entity theory of moral character. When participants were subsequently presented with scenarios of moral transgression, those in the entity theory condition had significantly more negative affective reactions compared to participants in the incremental theory condition. Similarly, Chiu, Dweck, Tong, and Fu (1997) found that participants with entity theories of morality wanted to punish moral transgressors much more harshly compared to incremental theorists of morality. Thus, when an immoral action is attributed to a fixed character, it is judged much more harshly by participants.

Little research, however, has examined how lay theories of moral character affect individuals' interpretation of their own moral successes and failures. Yet, if lay theories function similarly in the moral domain as in the academic domain, they may have an important effect on moral motivation. For example, if an individual holds an entity theory of morality (believing that moral character is fundamentally fixed) and cheats in an exam, he/she might start identifying themselves as a 'cheater'. This, in turn, might lead to more cheating in the future. Similarly, after doing a good deed, such as helping somebody else, an entity theory of morality may lead one to believe that they have established their moral credentials. When their credentials are established, they may no longer feel the need to act morally if they are faced with a situation where they need to choose between acting morally and following their self-interest (for research on moral credentials, see Merritt, Effron, & Monin, 2010). In contrast, if an individual has an

incremental theory of moral character, he/she may respond to moral successes and failures in the opposite way. After a moral failure, for example, the individual may believe that s/he needs to try harder to make the right choice next time, rather than forever tarnishing their moral character. Thus, as in the academic domain, lay theories of moral character may play an important role in influencing how moral successes and failures are framed. Such interpretation, in turn, may have important influences on moral judgments, prescription of punishment or rehabilitation, and moral motivation.

An important conclusion from this body of research is that it can actually influence the lay theory of individuals who are consumers of this research. Miller et al. (2007) successfully manipulated the lay theory of participants by presenting them with a convincing and realistic research article espousing a particular lay theory of character. The article used in the manipulation argued that “[p]sychologists and social scientists have arrived at the conclusion that people possess a relatively finite set of rather fixed traits,” and presented evidence of supporting findings. This suggests that if actual research on morality and moral exemplars do imply particular lay theories of morality, this may influence the lay theories of actual consumers of this research, such as researchers, educators, developers of interventions, and the general public. In the next section, I examine some of the dominant approaches to moral psychology, suggesting that they primarily imply an entity theory of moral character.

## **II. Lay Theories Implied in Research on Moral Psychology**

The study of morality has gained increased prominence in psychology, in part due to the recognition that moral concerns play a key role in many aspects of human life. Research on moral psychology is now viewed as a critical part of understanding decision-making (Haidt & Kesebir, 2010) group identification (Leach, Ellemers, & Barreto, 2007) and interpersonal relationships (Rai & Fiske, 2011). A variety of approaches have been developed to understand

morality, including evolutionary moral foundations (Haidt & Kesebir, 2010), moral identity (Aquino, Freeman, Reed, Lim & Felps, 2009), moral reasoning (Kohlberg, 1969), and neurological bases of moral decision-making (Greene, Morelli, Lowenberg, Nystrom & Cohen, 2008). Not much is common in these approaches in terms of their methods, levels of analysis, highlighted processes, and even how the moral domain is demarcated. For example, whereas social neuroscientists examine reactions to moral dilemmas carefully designed to tease apart biases in decision making, Haidt and colleagues study phenomena such as loyalty to an ingroup not typically considered to be in the moral domain. However, despite this diversity in work on morality, most approaches have one assumption in common: viewing morality as a static property of individuals, situations, or relationships, which implies an entity theory of morality.

To illustrate, I will focus on three popular approaches to morality. First, I will examine Haidt and colleague's Moral Foundations Theory. Second, I will examine neuroscientific accounts of moral judgment popularized by Greene, Cushman and others. And third, I will examine research on moral self-concept and moral identity as bases of moral motivation. As I examine these three foci of research, my argument will not be that the approaches are overtly espousing a particular lay theory of morality. Rather, I will suggest that a consumer of this research would be left with the impression that morality is an unchangeable property of individuals.

One of the most popular approaches to understanding moral judgments is Moral Foundations Theory. According to Haidt and Kesebir (2010), humans evolved five distinct cognitive mechanisms, called moral foundations, that form the basis of all moral decisions. However, different individuals and communities rely on the different foundations to different degrees. Haidt and Kesebir argue that the main reason that liberals and conservatives disagree about their moral judgments is their emphasis of different foundations. Liberals rely primarily on

moral foundations of harm and care, whereas conservatives also emphasize foundations of purity, authority, and loyalty. In this prominent theory of moral judgments, individuals ‘find’ themselves with strong intuitions about certain foundations, which form the basis of their moral decisions. Yet, how these intuitions develop, become more important than others, or change over time is not emphasized. For example, according to this account, a social conservative might have a strong intuition against gay marriage based on the moral foundation of purity. Since the evolutionary foundations and the intuitions appear to be fixed, however, it is not clear, how the theory would account for the same individual’s changing views on gay marriage. Individuals who come to possess a tendency to favor certain foundations and intuitions are largely stuck with them.

This account of fixed moral judgments is supported by a deterministic description of the relationship between intuitions and reasoning in the social intuitionist account of moral judgments (Haidt & Kesebir, 2010). The evolutionarily determined moral foundations give rise to intuitions that dominate an individual’s reactions to moral situations. Moral intuitions have primacy over moral reasoning - our intuitions determine our instantaneous reactions, and moral reasoning largely exists to justify these automatic reactions. Since the intuitions are fixed, and dominate reactions to others’ moral behavior, our reactions to the morality of others are also entirely fixed. Even though Haidt and his colleagues don’t explicitly make this argument, through a combination of the Moral Foundations Theory and the social intuitionist account of morality, a very clear suggestion is made that our reactions to moral phenomena are at the mercy of our stable, fixed intuitions that cannot change. The emphasis on civility as a solution is the inevitable conclusion of this approach – if we cannot change our moral intuitions and responses, the best we can do is to be civil to each other given the inevitable differences between us.

This research, however, does not consider other perspectives that suggest a more fluid relationship between intuitions, reasoning, and moral judgments. For example, according to Monin, Pizarro, and Beer (2007), whereas shocking moral transgressions invite intuitive reactions, being confronted with difficult moral dilemmas leads to complex moral deliberation. This suggests a less fixed relationship between intuitions and moral judgments – sometimes our reactions might be dominated by intuitions, but sometimes moral deliberation can play a much more central role. Thus, the kind of situation we are presented with is important. What other factors affect this relationship? Does this relationship change over time? Do certain events and experiences lead to the emphasis of one moral foundation over the other? Are there developmental trajectories that lead to emphasizing one over the other? Can one ‘train’ to emphasize deliberation more? The static view of moral judgment espoused by Haidt and colleagues does not try to answer these questions, as the implicit assumption of the theory is the static nature of our moral intuitions and judgments.

Another popular account of moral judgments is provided by social neuroscience (Greene et al., 2008). This approach emerged from a need to understand inconsistencies in how people tend to respond to moral dilemmas. In one famous example, the trolley problem, participants are presented with two different versions of an apparently very similar moral dilemma. In both versions of the dilemma, participants have to make a choice between letting a trolley run over 1 person or 5 people. The difference between the scenarios is how exactly the participants have to make this choice: they either have to pull a lever to divert the trolley towards the single person, or physically push a person in front of the trolley to stop it. Even though the consequences are the same for the two actions (1 person dies, 5 are saved), most people will not endorse pushing the person, but will endorse pulling the lever to divert the trolley.

A variety of accounts have tried to explain why people respond differently to these two scenarios. One of the more popular neuroscientific accounts argues that we have two separate systems to make moral judgments, and the systems often produce conflicting responses (Cushman & Greene, 2012). One is an affective system that evolved in order to stop us from doing certain actions. The authors argue that two elements in the ‘push’ scenario trigger this evolutionary affective response. First, when we are judging a harm that is caused by a direct transfer of a person’s muscular force, we imagine ourselves doing the same action and activating parts of our brain responsible for motor planning. Furthermore, according to the authors, we evolved a system that has a negative affective reaction towards such motor actions, stops the behavior, and directs the same negative reaction toward others who are engaging in similar motor action. Thus, we have strong affective negative reactions to somebody who is pushing another person in order to harm them because we have evolved systems to stop us from doing the same. Second, we have evolved a similar system to stop us from using people as a means to an end. Thus, when the two factors combine – an individual uses muscular force to directly harm somebody to achieve another goal, the behavior is evaluated extremely negatively. In the lever version of the scenario, these affective triggers are absent: muscular force is being used to pull a lever, not to directly harm somebody. Furthermore, the single individual is not directly being used to save the five others: he/she is harmed as a byproduct of the actions of saving the five. The researchers argue that the second system is much slower, deliberative, and involves a utilitarian calculation of minimizing harm. When the affective response is absent in the ‘lever’ scenario, the utilitarian system dominates and participants judge the course of action that minimizes harm as the most moral. In contrast, in the ‘push’ scenario, the affective system overwhelms the utilitarian system, and pushing one to save five is not endorsed.

There are competing hypotheses that also attempt to explain such differential reactions to subtly different moral dilemma scenarios (for an example, see Moll, Oliveira-Souza & Zahn, 2009). However, all explanations uniformly propose an evolution based moral reaction that is hardwired into our neurological systems. Explanations of moral action that rely entirely on evolutionarily hardwired systems in the brain can easily lead to an entity theory of morality: if an individual acts immorally, it may be because of an unchangeable biological response. The authors reinforce this perspective by studying individuals with psychopathy: those who rate higher on psychopathy and Machiavellianism also tend to make more utilitarian judgments, suggesting that they have a fundamental deficit in their automatic response (Bartels & Pizarro, 2011). A neurological account is not necessarily incompatible with an incremental theory of morality (one might point out for example, the inherent plasticity in neural structures). However, given the current focus of the researchers on unchangeable evolution-based systems, an entity theory of morality is strongly implied.

An entity theory of morality is also implied in research that examines individuals' own moral motivation. A variety of research, ranging from moral licensing (Merritt, Effron, Fein, Savitsky, Tuller, & Monin, 2010) and moral cleansing (Jordan, Mullen and Murnighan, 2011) to moral hypocrisy (Valdesolo & DeSteno, 2007), has focused on understanding the various situational factors that affect people's moral motivation and moral effort. In these studies, participants are often placed in situations that make them appear more or less moral, and the researchers examine the participants' reactions. Theoretically, a number of reactions to such situations may be examined, including feelings of shame or guilt that may have a long term effect on their moral self-concept and behavior. However, despite the diverse goals of these various research programs, they invariably focus on the participants' efforts to return to a status quo of appearing like moral people. By overwhelmingly focusing on how participants keep up an

appearance of morality in various situations, the researchers show how participants can avoid any need to have a more lasting change in their moral character. The research does not directly address whether the underlying moral character of participants is changeable. However, by focusing on ways that participants avoid change and maintain the status quo, the research implies an entity theory of morality where character is not changeable.

For example, one body of research focuses on participants' efforts to cleanse themselves when they feel that their moral self-image may have been tarnished (Jordan et al., 2011). In one study, participants who were asked to recall a time when they were immoral (i.e., used others to get something they wanted), showed more intentions to be pro-social afterwards (i.e., donate blood, volunteer, or donate to a charity), compared to participants who were asked to recall a time when they helped somebody. The authors explained that when participants are asked to recall an immoral action, they want to cleanse their moral self-concept by doing something moral. The implication is that once the 'cleansing' is complete, participants will return to their base level of morality, and avoid any lasting change that may result from their encounter with their prior immoral action.

Studies on moral licensing have examined a similar, but flipped, scenario by exposing participants to situations where initially their morality is confirmed. Thus, they examine participants' behavior in situations where they are temporarily freed from the concern of maintaining their moral status quo. In one study, participants were given an opportunity to confirm that they are not racist by allowing them to choose a very well-qualified minority applicant for a hypothetical job opportunity (Monin & Miller, 2001). By choosing the well-qualified minority applicant, participants got to confirm their moral credentials as non-racist. Participants in a different experimental condition were not given the opportunity to choose a minority applicant – all the applicants were members of a majority group. Afterwards, when both



groups of participants were presented with a situation where their actions could potentially be viewed as racist (not choosing a well-qualified minority applicant for a potentially hostile work environment), those who were given the opportunity to confirm their non-racist credentials were much more likely to make the potentially racist choice.

Again, in studies on moral licensing and moral cleansing, the primary focus of the research is how participants maintain their moral status quo by acting more morally when their morality is challenged or less morally when their morality is confirmed. This focus has made important contributions to understanding how situational factors can affect temporary changes in individuals' moral motivation. However, since the research overwhelmingly focuses on participants' efforts to maintain a moral self-concept instead of potentially lasting change, it implies an entity theory of morality to its audience.

More recent research has in fact shown that more desire for lasting change and improvement is in fact an important part of how people respond to morally relevant events. For example, feeling ashamed about a wrongdoing has been specifically identified as a potential catalyst for change. Lickel, Kushlev, Savalei, Matta, & Schmader (2014) found that when participants are asked to recall a series of emotional events, the events that participants felt ashamed about led to a desire to change something about who they are as a person in the long run. More specifically, Leach & Cidam (2015) showed in a meta-analysis that when participants feel ashamed about something that is more reparable, this can lead to an increased desire for self-improvement. Thus, it is possible to examine specific catalysts for more lasting change in moral character. However, most research has focused on the participants' motivation to maintain the moral status quo.

Other research that examines the role of potentially more stable traits on moral motivation also implies an entity theory of morality. For example, research by Aquino and Reed

examines the importance that individuals give to morality in their personal identity (i.e., how important moral characteristics are to who they are and what they do). In several studies, they found that participants who report that moral characteristics such as being honest and caring are important to who they are, tend to also report more intentions to volunteer, and actually donate more food (Aquino & Reed, 2002). Yet, the focus of the research is again on fixed properties possessed by the participants, and how an individual's moral identity develops or changes is not examined. When researchers study change, the focus on situational primes that may temporarily boost or inhibit an individual's self-importance of moral identity (Aquino et al., 2009). However, there is no research or discussion of any factors that might lead to lasting change in this variable. Thus, the reader of this research might understand that a moral identity is a fixed, stable trait possessed by certain individuals.

It is certainly possible that these accounts can also accommodate a more developmental perspective that allows for change in the moral self-concept. However, the predominant focus of the field is on unchangeable moral judgments, fixed traits, and motivations to maintain the status quo rather than moral growth. Thus, much of the research in moral psychology implies an entity theory of morality, which might affect the lay theories of morality of those who are consumers of this research. This effect may be especially pronounced in the case of research focused on moral exemplars - individuals who have been recognized for their exceptional moral behavior. As we often take the lives of moral exemplars as models for our own moral lives, viewing moral exemplars with an entity theory of morality may affect how we see our own morality as well as that of the exemplars. Thus, I next discuss prominent approaches to the study of moral exemplars to examine if they suggest particular lay theories of the moral self.

### **III. Lay Theories Implied in Research on Moral Exemplars**

Initial attempts to research moral development were dominated by Kohlberg's stages model. Basing his model on the stages of cognitive development proposed by Piaget, Kohlberg (1969) argued that moral action is a result of the development of sophisticated capacities to reason objectively about moral questions. As individuals develop increasingly more sophisticated forms of moral reasoning, they ultimately come to make objective moral judgments based on the purportedly universal principles of justice. According to this perspective, moral exemplars might be those individuals who reach this level of cognitive and moral development. Indeed, research has shown that moral exemplars may have more mature levels of moral reasoning than others (Matsuba & Walker, 2004).

Kohlberg's model of moral action has increasingly come under criticism from a variety of sources. More recent theories have argued that moral action stems from sources other than rational deliberation, such as heuristics (Stanovich & West, 2000) or intuitions (Haidt, 2007). In fact, there is widespread disagreement about the precise role of moral reasoning in moral action. According to Haidt, for example, moral reasoning merely serves as an after-the-fact justification for conclusions already reached by an individual's intuitions. Others argue that moral reasoning plays an important, but still limited role in guiding moral action. For example, after a comprehensive review of studies that examine the link between moral reasoning and action, Blasi (1980) concluded that the link between moral reasoning and action is at best inconsistent. Similarly, Walker (2004) argued that reasoning accounts for about 10 percent of the variance in moral behavior, and suggested that there is an 'action gap' – additional variables need to be studied in order to link moral reasoning to action, such as emotions, values, or identity. Optimum reasoning itself is not sufficient to produce moral action, or extraordinary moral behavior. Thus, in order to understand moral exemplars, researchers have begun to study a variety of other factors, such as personality traits, values, and identity.

Most recent research on moral exemplars follows a two-stage process. In the first stage, the researchers identify an exemplary group of people, such as people who have been selected for national or local awards. Next, based on the specific theory the researchers are interested in, interviews and surveys of these exemplary individuals are used to identify the personal characteristics that make them moral standouts. In one line of research, for example, the researchers contacted a variety of different organizations, including ones focused on social, health, religious, and human and animal rights, and asked executives from these organizations to nominate young adults who demonstrate extraordinary social commitment (Matsuba & Walker, 2004). After identifying a group of 40 young adult exemplars, and matching them with 40 other non-exemplars, the researchers compared the two groups for a variety of differences in their survey and interview responses. The results showed that moral exemplars differed from control participants in important ways. For example, the exemplars were significantly more Agreeable, were more likely to be willing to commit to an adult identity, and were more willing to seek out others and trust them in close relationships.

The method of identifying ways in which moral exemplars have ‘better’ characteristics than control participants has become widespread. Another line of research examined how the relative importance of agency and communion motivations may be different from those who are not viewed as moral exemplars. Frimer, Walker and colleagues have argued that for exemplars, agency and communion should be mutually supportive and integrated. For example, exemplars should desire to be successful so they can help others, and they should help others out of enlightened self-interest. In other words, benefiting others and benefiting oneself should be closely aligned in moral exemplars. To find support for this hypothesis, Frimer, Walker, Lee, and William (2012) asked faculty who should be knowledgeable about historical figures (i.e., professors in political science, journalism, law, and history) to rate 40 randomly selected

influential figures on a variety of morally relevant characteristics: being principled, consistent, brave, inspiring, and humble. Next, the researchers compared the speeches and interviews of those 15 influential figures who were rated highest on these dimensions (the moral exemplars) with those who ranked in the bottom 15 (influential figures who are not moral exemplars).

Specifically, they developed a coding scheme that examines whether the exemplars mention themes related to agency (self-promoting themes) and communion (other promoting themes) as means to an end, or as a terminal goal in themselves. For instance, they coded whether a certain instance of agency motivations is discussed as a way to accomplish communion goals (wanting to earn money to help the poor), or actually as an end in itself (wanting to earn money for its own sake). The results showed that, in their speeches and interviews, moral exemplar's agentic goals were in service to communal goals. The comparison leaders, in contrast, discussed agentic goals as ultimate goals, ends in themselves. In a similar study, Frimer, Walker, Dunlop, Lee, and Riches (2007) compared 25 winners of a national award for volunteerism with matched control participants. Two-hour long interviews on the participants' life stories were coded for themes of agency (self-mastery, status, achievement, and empowerment) and communion (love, friendship, dialog, caring, and unity) as well as the compatibility between the two motivations. The results showed that for the exemplar group, compatibility between agency and communion themes was significantly higher. In a final set of studies that supported their theory, Walker and Frimer (2009) found that university students who integrated agency and communion themes (i.e., expressed these themes in close proximity in interviews) were significantly more likely to engage in self-reported moral behavior compared to those who did not integrate such themes. Together, this research demonstrates that moral exemplars appear to have a different motivational structure compared to non-exemplar individuals.

Thus, a variety of studies has examined the personality characteristics that distinguish moral exemplars from ordinary individuals. What these studies have in common is an exclusive focus on the exemplars' current characteristics, without examination of the exemplars' life trajectory. Thus, there is little analysis of how the exemplars came to be so extraordinary. Like the rest of social and personality psychology focused on morality, the study of moral exemplars appears to be focused on examining present-day snapshots of ideally functioning moral exemplars. Even though perspectives focused on growth and change are not incompatible with this research, an emphasis on present moral traits and moral behavior seems to suggest that the exemplars have always had these qualities: they were always agreeable, integrated agency and communion motives, and integrated others as a part of their identity. Thus, this focus suggests that researchers of moral exemplars have an entity theory of morality.

Unlike other research in morality, however, the study of exemplars has shown some interest in examining moral trajectories. For example, in an effort to understand how exemplars develop, there has been a much greater focus on studying the moral lives of adolescents. One study examined how adolescent exemplars who have demonstrated extraordinary altruistic commitments to care for others might differ from control participants in the same age group (Hart & Fegley, 1995). The researchers contacted churches, social agencies, schools, and youth groups, requesting nominations of exemplars who were extraordinary in involvement with their community and in service to others. As in prior studies, a group of matched control participants was selected and all participants were interviewed and given surveys. The results showed real differences between the groups. For example, the moral exemplars described themselves in more moral and caring terms, suggesting that moral concerns were closely integrated into their moral self-concept. This research on younger moral exemplars shows the field's interest in understanding their development over the life course. However, merely showing that younger

exemplars have distinctive characteristics does not suggest an incremental theory of morality. In fact, it might suggest that certain defining characteristics are always possessed by moral exemplars, regardless of age, further supporting an unchanging entity theory of moral character.

Other themes in research on moral exemplars do specifically address how moral exemplars might actually develop. For example, Reimer and Wade (2004) examined how moral exemplars symbolically represent those who have influenced their moral identity. Using a similar method as Hart and Fegley to identify care exemplars, Reimer and Wade asked for community nominations of care exemplars and compared 15 care exemplars with 15 comparison adolescents. After giving participants a semi-structured interview to explore their identity concepts, they conducted a computer based linguistic analysis to examine the themes discussed by the participants. They found that when discussing their self-concept, care exemplars integrated parent representations into their actual selves, whereas the comparison sample did not. The prominence of parent representations suggests that in the development of moral exemplars, how they view and represent their parents might play a particularly important role. The importance of early social influences on the development of moral exemplars can be more closely studied.

Another way that research on moral exemplars has gone beyond other areas of moral psychology in focusing on developmental themes is by asking adult moral exemplars to reconstruct key events, persons, or influences from their past. More specifically, researchers have sought to understand whether constructing key events in terms of redemption, or turning a potentially negative event into a positive outcome, plays an important role in the lives of adult exemplars. In one study, researchers gave recipients of national bravery or care awards a personality survey and a life-review interview (Walker & Frimer, 2007). As a part of the interview, participants were asked to reflect on and describe critical life events in three different

developmental periods (childhood, adolescence and adulthood). The researchers coded whether the life events were described redemptively (negative state leads to a positive one) or in terms of contamination (a positive state leads to a negative one). The results showed that moral exemplars were significantly more likely to construct critical life events redemptively, suggesting that the perception of growth plays an important role in the development of exemplars. In a similar research that examined nominated young adult exemplars who demonstrated commitment to social organizations, Matsuba and Walker (2005) conducted a narrative life interview. Again, exemplars were much more likely to discuss critical life events in redemptive, rather than contamination, terms.

The focus on redemptive themes demonstrates that researchers who study moral exemplars are occasionally interested in themes of growth. However, even with this focus on redemptive themes, the researchers are not necessarily examining real change in moral character. The definition of redemption used by the researchers, turning a bad situation into a good one, does not necessarily indicate a change in character. For example, an individual may face a major life crisis such as a health problem, and if the individual overcomes this crisis and sees a ‘silver lining’ in it, this will classify as a redemptive event. The ability to turn bad situations into good ones, or to construct events as such in retrospect, does not imply that the underlying character did or did not change. Thus, this research does not truly imply an incremental theory of moral character.

The work that comes closest to analyzing true change in the character of moral exemplars is perhaps the in-depth analyses presented in *Some Do Care* (Colby & Damon, 1992). In this book, the authors undertake an in-depth qualitative analysis of the lives of several moral exemplars and argue that embracing change is a central part of the life of every exemplar they study. In one case study, for example, the authors analyze the life of the human rights activist



Andrei Sakharov. They note that he spent most of his adult life mostly aligned with the oppressive structure of the Soviet Union, focusing on his studies as a brilliant physicist, but mostly indifferent to social concerns. However, over time, as he faced moral dilemmas where he had to choose between keeping silent or speaking out against injustices, his moral concerns expanded. Eventually, he became a vocal human rights activist, which led to exile from his homeland. As well as depicting the moral growth that Sakharov went through, Colby and Damon also analyze various sources that were instrumental to this change, such as Sakharov's openness to new perspectives. Thus, the book depicts the transformation of Sakharov from a successful scientist indifferent to social injustices into a human rights activist willing to risk his life for his moral beliefs.

Even though Colby and Damon's analysis was an inspiration to many of the studies of exemplars that followed, most subsequent quantitative analyses of moral exemplars do not address change at this deeper level. Furthermore, even Colby and Damon's research does not fully account for the full range of growth that may be important in the life of a moral exemplar. In most cases where incremental theories are studied in the domain of intelligence, participants actually go from academic *failure* to success (Hong et al., 1999, Study 2). However, most studies on moral exemplars have examined how growth from moral *failure* may have been an important part of their development into extraordinary moral exemplars. Even in the analysis of the life of Sakharov, his progression is from indifference to moral concern, rather than from moral failure to moral success. This account does not capture the way the term redemption is most commonly used: deliverance or growth from one's moral failures.

Thus, even though many researchers have been interested in developmental themes in the lives of exemplars, few researchers have truly examined change of character in their lives. However, examining imperfect exemplars who have experienced both moral successes and moral

failures may be important for at least three reasons. First, examining failures as well as successes may simply be a more accurate representation of exemplars' lives. Just like any other person, exemplars are also imperfect, and the accounts of their lives and the explanation of their psychological strengths should take their failures into account. Studying exemplars as imperfect beings may simply be a more accurate way to examine who they are.

Second, it is possible that learning and growing from moral failures may be an important part of exemplars' motivation. Psychological research is increasingly concerned with understanding why moral exemplars become who they are. If they are studied as perfect individuals, a very important part of their motivational structure may be ignored – we may not have a full understanding of the development of exemplars. As discussed in the previous section, moral failures can be important catalysts for change, growth and self-improvement. When individuals feel ashamed about something they have done, and the cause of this shame is reparable, they may respond constructively by, for example, wanting to improve themselves (Lickel et al. 2014; Leach & Cidam, 2015). More research is needed to examine the motivational role of failures in the lives of moral exemplars.

Third, we eventually find out about the failures of our moral heroes – they hardly stay hidden forever. Our encounters with moral exemplars are seldom purely positive. Insofar as we care about moral exemplars because of the influence they wield, we should understand how they affect individuals who come to find out about their heroes' imperfections. If researchers only study how people are inspired by perfect exemplars, the full range of the positive or negative influence that exemplars may have on others will be difficult to understand.

In this chapter, I suggested that much psychological research on morality and moral exemplars imply, perhaps unintentionally, an entity theory of morality. I argued that this unacknowledged bias may be important, as it may also influence the lay theories of morality of

consumers of this research. Another unintended effect of bias towards entity theory is that little is known about how people react to incremental theories of morality. In the next chapter, I attempt to address this gap in research by studying reactions to moral exemplars whose lives explicitly suggest an incremental theory of morality. I will report 6 studies that examined how individuals react to an imperfect moral hero who fails and grows from his failure. Thus, unlike much of the research reviewed in Chapter I, the studies that I will discuss in Chapter II imply an incremental theory of morality, that change in moral character is possible.

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## Chapter II

### **When Skeletons Leave the Closet: Inspiration by Imperfect Moral Exemplars**

Throughout history, exemplars have been instrumental in shaping the moral life of individuals and societies. Reading about Mother Theresa's life of selfless care of the disenfranchised or Martin Luther King Jr.'s years of marches for justice can motivate people to be more moral in their own lives (Aquino, McFerran, & Laven 2011). However, psychological research has generally focused on understanding what leads somebody to *become* an exemplar (e.g., Walker & Frimer, 2007), not how their moral life *influence* others' motivation to be moral. Key factors that determine how people are affected by exemplars' lives have not been emphasized. Furthermore, perhaps with the assumption that failures would undermine them as exemplars, the quest for understanding a moral exemplar has focused predominantly on their positive qualities. Yet, the lives of moral exemplars we encounter are much more complex. Just like everybody else, their life stories are full of both successes as well as failures, which often come to light. Little research has examined how such imperfect exemplars affect our motivation to be moral.

In 6 studies, we examined how exposure to the life story of a moral exemplar influences participants' moral motivation. We compared a perfect moral life story to one that included a serious moral failure or a moral failure from which the exemplar grew to become a moral hero. We were particularly interested in whether the exemplar's growth from a moral failure could reverse the otherwise deleterious effects of the failure on participants' modeling of the exemplar as well as their more general moral motivation.

### **The Influence of Moral Exemplars**



Extensive psychological research has focused on understanding the psychological factors that characterize a moral exemplar. After all, if we can understand how these individuals are able to sacrifice so much for their moral commitments, it may be possible for others to emulate them. Attempts to understand moral exemplars have ranged from an in-depth examination of their biographies (Colby & Damon, 1992), to identifying personality traits associated with brave or caring exemplars (Walker & Frimer, 2007), to studying how moral exemplars integrate agency and communion goals (Frimer, Walker, Lee, Riches, Dunlop, 2012). However, we are fascinated by the lives of moral exemplars partly because their words and actions wield great influence on the way that others think about their own lives. Yet little research has examined this influence. The limited extant research that studied influences of others' moral behavior has focused on reactions to isolated incidents. For example, Aquino et al. (2011) showed that when participants are faced with another person's extraordinary act of forgiveness, they are more motivated to be moral themselves. In contrast, Monin, Sawyer, and Marquez (2008) found that participants' moral self-image was threatened when they saw another individual act morally if they themselves did not make the same choice. However, such a focus on responses to isolated behaviors provides limited insights into how we actually respond to the lives of moral exemplars.

While it is possible that we might encounter isolated actions by strangers, more often we are inspired by people's character and commitment over longer periods. In fact, increasingly, research is establishing that in moral judgments in general, individuals seek information that will help evaluate the other person's moral character as a whole. For example, immoral actions that are believed to be more diagnostic of a person's character are judged much more harshly than less diagnostic actions (Uhlmann, Pizarro, Diermeier & 2015). Despite the importance of judgments of a person's moral character, most research continues to assess reactions only to isolated moral behaviors with little concern for a whole moral life that is likely more indicative

of moral character. More research that assesses behaviors in the context of a broader life story is necessary.

An important consequence of the emphasis on isolated behaviors is that it leads to an exclusive focus on moral success. After all, if only single actions are examined as a source of moral motivation, studying moral success is the only approach that makes sense. However, a glance at the life of any moral hero reveals crises and shortcomings along with inspiring actions. For example, in his autobiography, Gandhi admits that he once stole from his own brother. How do people react when they confront the fact that their moral hero is actually imperfect, just like everybody else? Indeed, a good deal of previous research shows that a single immoral act can undermine our sense of a person as moral (e.g., Trafimow & Trafimow 1999; Rozin & Royzman, 2001; for a review, see Brambilla & Leach, 2014). Would this ruin him as a moral model, reducing Gandhi's power as a motivation for us to be more moral? Yet, moral exemplars are often studied as near perfect beings, with little examination of the faults and foibles inevitable in the course of a human life. A study of reactions to failures of our moral heroes is only possible if lives, rather than single behaviors, become a focus of study.

A focus purely on isolated behaviors precludes the study of another key variable in how we respond to the moral lives of others: their trajectory and potential growth. Character is not a static entity; indeed, it can change over time. If Gandhi's moral failure was presented as a basis for growth in a longer life trajectory, could the otherwise demotivating effects of the moral failure be eliminated? The limited available evidence suggests that information about the trajectory of someone's character is very important to moral judgments. For example, people who commit to a standard of behavior and then violate the standard are judged very harshly as hypocrites. On the other hand, if the person violates a standard and then later advocates for it, the audience is much more forgiving: advocating later leaves open the possibility that the

individual is turning a new leaf, suggesting a potential for growth (Barden, Rucker & Petty, 2005). Thus, the possibility of positive change can lead to a more favorable evaluation of moral failure (Monin & Merritt, 2010). Similarly, narratives of redemption play a very important role in life stories in the U.S (McAdams, 2006). Indeed, redemption life stories can have constructive consequences: alcoholics with redemptive self-narratives are much more likely to stay sober (Dunlop & Tracy, 2013) and adults with redemptive life stories have greater well-being (McAdams, Reynolds, Lewis, Patten & Bowman, 2001). However, research on redemption primarily focuses on the effect of perceiving growth in one's own life, rather than the motivating effect of perceiving growth in others. Research outside the domain of morality has identified factors that lead to forgiveness after an offense (for example, see Hui, Lau, Tsang, & Pak, 2011), and being inspired by the struggles of an academic exemplar (Hong & Lin-Siegler, 2012). Yet, little research to date has examined how participants respond to the life of a moral exemplar, including his successes, failures, and growth.

### **Overview**

We conducted six experiments in which we presented participants with the successful life story of a famous moral exemplar that also sometimes included a description of a single moral failure. Unlike previous research that focused only on perceptions of the target, we examined three different kinds of reaction to the moral exemplar: self-focused reactions (how the exemplar affects one's own moral self-perception and motivation), other-focused reactions (evaluations of the exemplar), and dual-focused reactions (perception of the relationship with the exemplar and emotions about the exemplar).

In Studies 1a-c, we examined how the nature of a moral failure (growth vs. no growth) affected other-focused and dual-focused reactions to and modeling of the exemplar. In Study 2, we expanded our examination of modeling the moral exemplar to include effects of the

exemplar's moral failure on (self-focused) moral self-concept. In addition, we examined effects on the more broad-based outcome of participant's more general motivation to be moral (i.e., altruistic motivation, concern for others, willingness to volunteer). Together, the full set of other-focused, dual-focused, and self-focused reactions to a moral exemplar's failure provide a model of peoples' moral motivation in response. Studies 3 and 4 replicated and extended these results by accounting for important alternative explanations and possible limitations. In Study 3, we examined whether participants would react similarly to an unknown exemplar's failure, or whether growth was only motivating due to the iconic status of the famous figure examined. Although this unknown figure is likely to be less motivating, his growth from failure should still be modeled in a way similar to that of Gandhi's. In Study 4, we examined whether participants are motivated (to be more moral or competent) by a moral exemplar's growth from a competence failure. Given the supreme importance of morality in person perception and evaluation (for a review, see Brambilla & Leach, 2014), we can expect that moral failure and growth have greater effects on how moral exemplars are viewed.

### **Studies 1a-c**

Based in recent calls for assessments of the replicability of findings across studies (e.g., Funder et al., 2013), we conducted three experiments. Thus, we used very similar methods with sufficient sample size ( $N = 194-258$ ) to establish good power ( $\sim .75$ ) to detect medium-size effects across the three studies. To establish the consistency of results across different samples, the three experiments were conducted with two diverse non-student samples and one student sample under more controlled "laboratory" conditions. Furthermore, our statistical approach accounted for the fact that, due to sampling error, it is impossible to find exactly the same results across different studies. In fact, extreme consistency across studies undermines the believability of findings, rather than increasing it (Schimmack, 2012). In addition, multiple measures within

studies, and multiple samples and materials across studies, can weaken inference by increasing the family-wise error rate and introducing variation in statistical parameters and thus inconsistency in statistical tests. Thus, to better estimate the size, robustness, and replicability of the expected effects on moral modeling, we examine all three experiments in multi-study analyses that account for possible variation across studies as well as variation across measures by estimating the size of all experimental effects simultaneously (rather than estimating only their statistical significance in a series of independent ANOVAs).

## Method

**Participants.** For Study 1a, 210 participants were recruited from Amazon MTurk and were offered token financial compensation for their participation in the on-line study. In order to include only meaningful responses, those (10) participants who completed the study too quickly (above the 95th percentile) were excluded from analysis. This included participants who completed the study faster than 3.96 minutes, as pilot testing showed that this duration was too short for participants to understand instructions and to complete the study conscientiously. Since Amazon MTurk already includes limits for maximum time for study completion (20 minutes), no participants had to be excluded for taking too long. In addition, those (6) participants who scored 3 standard deviations above or below the mean score for any dependent variable were removed as extreme outliers. The exclusion of 16 participants in total brought the final number of participants to 194.

For Study 1b, 268 unique participants were recruited from Amazon MTurk. In order to include only meaningful responses, those (13) participants who completed the study too quickly (above the 95th percentile, i.e., < 3.73 minutes) were excluded from the analysis. In addition, those (10) participants who scored 3 standard deviations above or below the mean score for any

dependent variable were removed as extreme outliers. The exclusion of 23 participants in total brought the final number of participants to 245 ( $M_{\text{age}}=35.9$ ,  $SD=12.6$ ; 128 females, 117 males<sup>1</sup>).

Study 1c was an exact replication of Study 1b, seeking to reproduce our results in a different population in a more controlled “laboratory” setting. Thus, 294 undergraduates from a mid-sized public university in the Northeast U.S. participated in exchange for course credit. Thirteen participants who completed the on-line study too quickly (above the 95th percentile, i.e.,  $< 3.73$  minutes) or too slowly (below the 5<sup>th</sup> percentile, i.e.,  $> 35.63$  minutes) were excluded from the analysis. Pilot testing suggested that those who took too long were likely to have interrupted their work, likely invalidating the effects of the manipulation. They also appeared more likely to be distracted, perhaps due to multi-tasking, and thus did not appear to be sufficiently conscientious participants. In addition, (10) outliers whose scores were 3 SD above or below the scale means were excluded from analysis. In total, 36 participants were excluded, leaving a final sample of 258 ( $M_{\text{age}}=18.8$ ,  $SD=1.1$ , 170 females, 88 males).

**Procedure.** Participants were randomly assigned to read one of three (Study 1a) or four (Studies 1b and 1c) versions of a fact-based story about Gandhi’s life (see Table 1 for a summary of the designs; for the actual stories of all six studies, see <https://db.tt/X1Nqw8sk>). Stories in all conditions in all studies provided a brief overview of Gandhi’s life, celebrated his accomplishments, and noted his important contributions to social justice movements worldwide.

All three studies had three conditions in common where the story also included a clear moral failure taken from Gandhi’s autobiography (see Table 1): “Gandhi knew that his brother always carried around some pieces of gold, so it was easy for him to take some of this gold when his brother was not paying attention.” In the “failure without growth” condition no further information about Gandhi’s moral failure was provided. The “potential growth” condition stated either that Gandhi’s brother found out about the theft and forgave Gandhi (Study 1a) or that

Gandhi recognized the wrongness of his actions and confessed (Studies 1b and 1c)<sup>2</sup>. In the “actual growth” condition, Gandhi learned from the moral failure that he confessed: “This was Gandhi’s first insight into the power of truth: he learned that living, acting, and speaking honestly could transform his heart and his soul”. It is important to note that actual growth here is more than the acknowledgement of moral failure in the potential growth condition. We contrasted actual to potential growth because we expect that it is moral exemplars who actually grow from a moral failure, rather than simply acknowledge it, who will be most inspiring.

The fourth condition in studies 1b and 1c was an additional control condition where Gandhi’s moral failure was omitted altogether (see Table 1). This allowed us to compare the effects of failure with and without growth to not having failed at all. Thus, like in all other conditions, Gandhi’s accomplishments as well as his financial difficulty were described, but his debt was resolved without stealing from his brother: “Not long afterward, Gandhi was able to pay off his debt.”

**Measures.** After the manipulation, all participants were asked to answer other-focused and dual-focused questions about the story. Other-focused perceptions of the exemplar’s character were measured with a list of traits accompanied by a response scale ranging from ‘not at all’ (0) to ‘extremely’ (5) ( $\alpha$  1a=.83, 1b=.86, 1c=.84). Based on Leach, Ellemers, and Barreto (2007), we used three traits to measure morality in terms of trustworthiness (sincere, honest, trustworthy). Trustworthiness is one of the most widely agreed upon, and important, characteristics of morality (Leach et al., 2007). In order to compare perception of morality with perception of other aspects of Gandhi’s character, we also measured Gandhi’s perceived competence (i.e., competent, intelligent, skilled) ( $\alpha$  1a=.82, 1b=.72, 1c=.74), and sociability (i.e., warm, friendly, likeable) ( $\alpha$  1a=.86, 1b=.87, 1c=.84), as in Leach et al. (2007).

Dual-focused emotional elevation was measured by asking participants how much they felt each of the following emotions from ‘not at all’ (0) to ‘extremely’ (5): admiration, awe, and inspiration ( $\alpha$  1a=.87, 1b=.84, 1c=.79). These emotion words have been used to assess the elevated state that individuals may experience in reaction to acts of moral goodness (Aquino et al., 2011; Keltner & Haidt, 2003). Dual-focused closeness to the exemplar was examined with six items adapted from Tesser and colleagues research using a response scale ranging from ‘very strongly disagree’ (1) to ‘very strongly agree’ (7) (Tesser & Campbell, 1980). The items included questions such as ‘I have a lot in common with Gandhi’, ‘I feel a sense of being ‘connected’ with Gandhi’ and ‘Gandhi is nothing like me’ ( $\alpha$  1a=.89, 1b=.89, 1c=.78).

The main outcome in Studies 1a-c, modeling the exemplar, was measured by 3 questions adapted from Aquino et al. (2011), designed to capture how much participants feel that they can use Gandhi’s moral example as a model for their own lives. Using a scale that ranged from ‘very strongly disagree’ (1) to ‘very strongly agree’ (7), participants were presented with the following statements: ‘I feel like it’s possible for me to be a more moral person after reading this story,’ ‘The person in the story has shown me how to be a better person,’ ‘I can learn a lot from the person in the story’ ( $\alpha$  1a=.813, 1b=.736, 1c=.734).

## Results

Although an ANOVA approach to the mean levels of the dependent measures can be useful, it is a cumbersome and potentially misleading way to analyze the size and robustness of effects across the four dependent measures and three studies. Not accounting for the family-wise error rate, and random fluctuations of statistical parameters, across measures and across studies may bias such a series of significance tests. It also reduces statistical power. Thus, in response to recent calls for replication across samples and methods, greater statistical power, and the



better estimation of effect size and robustness (see Funder et al., 2013), we analyzed the experimental effects in Studies 1a-c on all measures simultaneously in a way that formally examines possible variation across studies.

**Effect of Failure.** To establish that the moral exemplar's failure undermined him as an exemplar, we examined the difference between the 'no failure' and 'failure without growth' conditions in Studies 1b and 1c (i.e., the two studies with a no failure control condition). To test the significance between the means reported in Figure 1, we examined a multi-group Structural Equation Model (SEM) using MPlus 7 software. We coded failure without growth and no failure as a simple contrast, -1 1, and constrained the difference between conditions to be equal across the two studies. Thus, a well-fitting model would show that the difference between the two conditions was consistent across the two studies.

The multi-group analysis showed perception of the exemplar's morality was significantly lower in the failure without growth condition than the no failure condition,  $b = .370, p < .001$ , 95% CI [.253, .482]. The model had excellent fit, indicating that the results were consistent across the two studies,  $\chi^2(1) = 1.574, p = .209$ ;  $CFI = .985, RMSEA = .069, SRMR = .066$ . Participants were also more emotionally elevated (measured with how much participants felt admiration, awe, and inspiration) in the no failure condition  $b = .240, p < .001$ , 95% CI [.092, .383], and good model fit showed consistency across the studies,  $\chi^2(1) = 0.150, p = .698$ ;  $CFI = 1.00, RMSEA < .001, SRMR = .013$ . Similarly, participants felt that the moral exemplar who failed without growth can be less of a moral model for them than the one who did not fail,  $b = .134, p = .034$ , 95% CI [.010, .256]. Again, good model fit indicated that the results were consistent across the two studies,  $\chi^2(1) = .065, p = .799$ ;  $CFI = 1.00, RMSEA < .001, SRMR = .009$ . The difference between conditions was not significant for closeness to the

exemplar,  $b = .092$ ,  $p = .141$ , 95% CI [-0.031, .215], but the model still fit well,  $\chi^2(1) = .045$ ,  $p = .832$ ;  $CFI = 1.00$ ,  $RMSEA < .001$ ,  $SRMR = .006$ . Taken together, results suggest that failure significantly undermined the exemplar as a moral model. Gandhi was perceived to be less moral, less emotionally elevating, and was seen as a less viable moral model when he failed without growth compared to when he did not fail at all.

**Effect of Growth.** To test our main hypotheses about the effect of growth after moral failure, we analyzed Studies 1a-c together in multi-group SEMs. Thus, we compared the failure without growth, potential growth, and actual growth conditions common to Studies 1a-c. We used a multi-group SEM to constrain the effect of these conditions to be equal across the three studies. Again, a well-fitting model would show that the manipulation had a similar effect on perception of the exemplar's morality, emotional elevation, closeness to the exemplar, and modeling of him, across the three studies. To represent precisely our hypothesis that actual growth should lead to more positive reactions to Gandhi's failure than failure without growth or potential growth, we represented our manipulation as a linear contrast: -1 0 1. Thus, we would expect a linear increase of mean scores across these three conditions. In order to check whether there was further systematic residual variance not explained by this linear contrast (Abelson & Prentice, 1997), we also included an alternative orthogonal quadratic contrast (-1 1 -1) in a preliminary set of analyses. As this alternative contrast coefficient was never significant (all  $p > .10$ ), we report only the focal linear contrast here.

**Multi-study Analysis of Modeling the Exemplar.** As a first step, we examined our main outcome of modeling the moral exemplar. The planned linear contrast representing our manipulation of the nature of Gandhi's failure had a significant, small, effect,  $b = .161$ ,  $p = .003$ , 95% CI [.057 .270]. Thus, modeling was highest in the actual growth condition and progressively lower in the potential growth and failure without growth conditions (see Figure 1).

Although there was some variation in the size and significance of this effect across studies (see Figure 1), the multi-group SEM had excellent fit to the data,  $X^2(2) = 1.53, p = .466; CFI = 1.00, RMSEA \leq .001, SRMR = .026$ . Thus, the linear increase in modeling Gandhi -- from failure without growth to potential growth to actual growth from failure -- did not differ significantly across the three studies.

**Multi-study Mediation Analysis of Modeling the Exemplar.** As shown in Figure 2, our three proposed mediators of modeling the exemplar had small to moderate inter-correlations (for a full list of correlations, see Tables 2-4). To account for this, we examined the effect of the planned linear contrast representing our manipulation of Gandhi's moral failure on the three proposed mediators simultaneously. To continue to account for variation across the three studies, we used a multi-study SEM analysis to examine perceived morality, closeness, and emotional elevation as mediators of the effect of the exemplar's failure on participants' use of him as a moral model. A preliminary model that included the orthogonal quadratic contrast discussed above showed only the focal linear contrast to have significant effects. Thus, the analyses presented here excluded the orthogonal quadratic contrast.

The fit of the model shown in Figure 2 was excellent and thus consistent with our hypothesis of full mediation,  $X^2(21) = 21.951, p = .402; CFI = .998, RMSEA = .015, SRMR = .071$ . As all estimated parameters were constrained to be equal across the three studies, excellent model fit also shows that effects were similar across studies. More specifically, the nature of the exemplar's failure had a significant small to medium-sized effect on all three mediators (all  $p < .05$ , see Figure 2 for standardized estimates of effect size). Thus, Gandhi's growth from failure led participants to perceive him as more moral, to feel closer to him, and to experience greater emotional elevation in response to him. Together, these other-focused and dual-focused reactions fully mediated the effect of the nature of Gandhi's failure on participants' modeling of

him. All three mediation pathways were significant and of similar magnitude: perceived morality of exemplar --  $p < .001$ , 95% CI [.036, .102], closeness to exemplar --  $p = .010$ , 95% CI [.012, .075], and emotional elevation  $p < .001$ , 95% CI [.042, .122].

None of the modification indices were statistically significant, indicating that allowing the paths to be different across studies would not improve model fit. In order to confirm this finding, a less constrained model was examined that allowed paths from the nature of the exemplar's failure to the mediating variables to vary across studies. This model had worse fit than our hypothesized model,  $X^2(15) = 19.904$ ,  $p = .175$ ;  $CFI = .990$ ,  $RMSEA = .041$ ,  $SRMR = .063$ . As another comparison to our hypothesized mediation model, we examined an alternative model that specified modeling the exemplar as a mediator of the effects of the manipulation of Gandhi's moral failure on perceived morality, closeness, and emotional elevation. This model, which reversed the places of the mediators and outcome in our hypothesized model, had worse fit than our hypothesized model,  $X^2(23) = 60.46$ ,  $p < .001$ ;  $CFI = .927$ ,  $RMSEA = .092$ ,  $SRMR = .096$ . Together, these additional tests offer further support of our hypothesis that the other- and dual-focused reactions to the exemplar's failure best explained his use as a moral model.

## Discussion

By subtly manipulating a true story about Gandhi's moral failure, we examined how the nature of an exemplar's failure affected participants' use of the exemplar as a moral model. In an analysis that accounted for variation across three studies, we found that his real moral failure led participants to perceive Gandhi as less moral, to feel less close to him, and to feel less emotionally elevated by him. Together, these other-focused and dual-focused reactions explained why Gandhi's failure lessened his ability to inspire participants to model him as a moral example. However, when this same failure was presented as a basis for his growth, Gandhi was viewed as positively as if he had not failed morally. Growing from his failure led

participants to perceive Gandhi as more moral, as closer to them, and as more emotionally elevating. These effects led the redeemed Gandhi to be a model for participants' own morality. Confidence in these findings is bolstered by our replication of findings across three closely related experiments that had good statistical power. In addition, we avoided the statistical dangers of multiple comparisons across measures and studies by increasing statistical power through multi-study analyses of all effects simultaneously (see Schimmack, 2012). Despite the natural variability in the pattern of means across measures and across studies (as shown in Figure 1), our multi-study analyses enabled us to make robust estimates of the observed effects and to establish their consistency across studies.

## **Study 2**

Study 2 was designed to replicate and extend Studies 1a-c in four principal ways. First, as Studies 1a-1c were all conducted online, we wanted to replicate them in a more controlled "laboratory" environment. Second, we wanted to examine whether a moral exemplar's failure could affect an individual's more general motivation to be moral. Thus, we examined participants' altruistic motivation, concern for others, and willingness to volunteer as outcomes. Third, we wanted to examine the self-focused mediator of moral self-concept as an additional explanation of reactions to a moral exemplar's failure. If an exemplar's growth from failure is truly inspiring it should lead individuals to view themselves as more moral. Studies 1a-c included only other-focused (perceived morality of exemplar) and dual-focused (perceived closeness, emotional elevation) mediators. Fourth, we aimed to strengthen our manipulation of the nature of Gandhi's moral failure by adding text to better differentiate the experimental conditions from one another.

## **Method**

**Participants.** 319 undergraduates from a public university in the Northeast U.S. participated in exchange for course credit. As participants completed the study in a controlled “laboratory” environment, no participants were removed due to duration. However, (8) outliers whose scores were 3 SD above or below the scale means were excluded from analysis. This left a final sample of 311 ( $M_{\text{age}} = 19.1$ ,  $SD=1.6$ ; 216 females, 95 males).

**Procedure.** As in Studies 1b and 1c, participants were randomly assigned to read one of four versions of Gandhi’s story (failure without growth, potential growth, actual growth, no failure). While the basic structure of the narratives was kept identical to Studies 1b and 1c, the differences between the narratives were strengthened in two ways. First, titles were added to each narrative to reinforce the message each narrative was designed to communicate: Thus, the ‘failure without growth’ condition was entitled ‘Mahatma Gandhi’s Mistake’; the ‘potential growth’ condition was entitled ‘Mahatma Gandhi Admitted Mistake’; the ‘actual growth’ condition was entitled ‘Mahatma Gandhi Learned from Mistake’, and the ‘no failure’ condition was entitled ‘Mahatma Gandhi’s Financial Difficulty’. Second, single sentences were added to the ‘potential growth’ and ‘actual growth’ conditions in order make these manipulations stronger. The potential growth condition now included “[Gandhi] later realized the wrongness of his actions...” and the actual growth condition included “The lesson was so profound that it changed the way [Gandhi] approached the rest of his life...”

**Measures.** The same questions as in the above studies were used here to measure participants’ perception of the exemplar’s morality ( $\alpha = .85$ ), emotional elevation ( $\alpha = .81$ ), closeness to the exemplar ( $\alpha = .86$ ), and modeling of the exemplar ( $\alpha = .740$ ). In addition, we measured the self-focused mediator of participants’ moral self-concept. Thus, based in Leach et al. (2007), we asked participants to ascribe trustworthiness ( $\alpha = .72$ ), sociability ( $\alpha = .82$ ), and

competence ( $\alpha = .73$ ) traits to themselves using a response scale ranging from ‘not at all’ (0) to ‘extremely’ (5).

General moral motivation was measured with three different scales, which were moderately inter-correlated,  $r = .33$  to  $.43$ . First, we adapted five items from the short version of the Self-report Altruism subscale of the Prosocial Personality Battery (Penner, 2002). The scale asks participants to rate on a 1-7 scale how likely they would be to engage in specific altruistic actions if the opportunity came up ( $\alpha = .72$ ). For example, “I would help carry a stranger's belongings (e.g., books, parcels, etc.)”, “I would let a neighbor whom I didn't know too well borrow an item of some value (e.g., tools, a dish, etc.)”. Second, we measured general concern for others with three items from the Moral Reasoning subscale of the Prosocial Personality Battery (Penner, 2002): “My decisions are usually based on my concern for other people”, “I choose a course of action that maximizes the help other people receive”, and “I choose alternatives that minimize the negative consequences to other people” ( $\alpha = .83$ ). Third, we assessed participants’ willingness to volunteer in ways that demand some self-sacrifice with five items from a scale that measures participants’ likelihood of volunteering at potential personal cost (Devoe & Pfeffer, 2007). Participants were asked to agree or disagree with five statements on a scale of 1-7 ( $\alpha = .78$ ). For example, “I am willing to volunteer for an organization I care about without financial compensation for me”, “Even for an organization I care about, I am unwilling to work without getting paid”. To account for the correlations between the scales of moral motivation, we created a latent variable for the mediation analyses below (see Figure 5).

## Results

Importantly, participants responded to the moral exemplar’s moral failure by perceiving him as less moral when he failed compared to when he did not fail,  $p < .05$  (see Figure 3).

Participants were also more emotionally elevated in the no failure condition compared to the no failure without growth condition,  $p < .05$  (see Figure 3). However, participants felt similar amounts of closeness to the exemplar in the failure without growth and no failure conditions (see Figure 3). In sum, moral failure had effects here parallel to those in Studies 1a-1c.

As in Studies 1a-c, we used the coefficients -1, 0, 1 to represent the predicted linear increase in scores through the failure without growth, potential growth, and actual growth conditions, and coefficients -1, 1, -1 for the orthogonal quadratic contrast to examine any systematic residual variance. As in Studies 1a-c, preliminary analyses showed the alternative quadratic contrast to have no significant effects. Thus, it was excluded from further analysis.

In further replication of Studies 1a-c, the linear contrast affected the exemplar's perceived morality, emotional elevation, and closeness to the exemplar, all  $p < .05$  (see Figure 4). As expected, the exemplar's growth from failure produced a more positive reaction than potential growth or failure without growth (for means, see Figure 3).

**Modeling the Exemplar.** Study 2 replicated the mediation model in Studies 1a-c of using Gandhi as a moral model (see Figure 4). This model fit the data extremely well,  $\alpha^2(1) = .076$ ,  $p = .783$ ;  $CFI = 1.00$ ,  $RMSEA < .001$ ,  $SRMR = .003$ , consistent with our hypothesis of full mediation. More specifically, the linear contrast representing the nature of Gandhi's failure had a significant, small-medium, direct effect on modeling the exemplar,  $b = .221$ , 95% CI [.052, .385],  $p = .009$ , which was mediated by closeness to the exemplar (95% CI [.015, .120],  $p = .035$ ), emotional elevation (95% CI [.048, .188],  $p = .003$ ), and perception of the exemplar's morality (95% CI = [.007, .100],  $p = .066$ ).

**Mediation of Moral Motivation.** The linear contrast had a significant, small-sized, direct effect on the latent variable of moral motivation,  $b = .136$ , 95% CI [.037, .247],  $p = .011$ ,  $\chi^2(2) = .702$ ,  $p = .704$ ;  $CFI = 1.00$ ,  $RMSEA < .001$ ,  $SRMR = .011$ . Pairwise comparisons of



means showed that participants were significantly more morally motivated in the condition where the exemplar failed with actual growth as compared to failure without growth,  $p = .05$  (see Figure 3. For a full list of correlations, see Table 5).

In a full mediation model, we examined (other- and dual-focused) modeling the exemplar and (self-focused) moral self-concept as mediators of participants' moral motivation (see Figure 5). This full mediation model fit the data very well,  $\chi^2(21) = 33.04$ ,  $p = .049$ ;  $CFI = .964$ ,  $RMSEA = .049$ ,  $SRMR = .054$ . The modeling of the exemplar increased by his growth from failure was a small-medium explanation of participants' more general motivation to be moral. The exemplar's growth through moral failure also increased participants' moral motivation by leading them to perceive themselves as more moral,  $p = .03$ , 95% CI [.014, .106]. In fact, as shown in Figure 5, the moral self-concept served as a medium-large explanation of participants' motivation to be moral.

In a first alternative model, we examined the possibility that instead of actually manipulating the exemplar's growth from failure, we only manipulated the exemplar's morality. Thus, we examined a model where only perception of the exemplar's morality served as a mediator of moral modeling and motivation. This model had poor fit,  $\chi^2(21) = 67.31$ ,  $p < .001$ ;  $CFI = .872$ ,  $RMSEA = .088$ ,  $SRMR = .078$ . In a second alternative model, we examined moral self-concept as a fourth mediator of modeling rather than as a mediator of moral motivation as in our hypothesized model. This second alternative model also had a poor fit -  $\chi^2(21) = 60.102$ ,  $p < .001$ ;  $CFI = .884$ ,  $RMSEA = .089$ ,  $SRMR = .083$ . In a third alternative model, we reversed the roles of the mediators and outcome in our hypothesized model by specifying moral motivation as a mediator of modeling and moral self-concept, which in turn predicted exemplar morality, emotional elevation, and closeness to exemplar. This model had marginal fit to the data,  $\chi^2(21)$

= 44.86,  $p = .002$ ;  $CFI = .929$ ,  $RMSEA = .070$ ,  $SRMR = .060$ , and fit less well than our hypothesized model.

## Discussion

Study 2 replicated and extended Studies 1a-c. Study 2 replicated Studies 1a-c by again showing that an exemplar's growth from moral failure increased modeling of the exemplar through the other-focused (i.e., exemplar morality) and dual-focused (closeness to exemplar, emotional elevation) reactions. In addition, Study 2 extended the preceding studies by showing that modeling the exemplar who grew was associated with greater motivation to be moral. In a further extension of Studies 1a-c, we showed that an exemplar's growth through failure also improved individual's moral self-concept. This self-focused mediator actually had a greater link to participants' moral motivation than modeling of the exemplar. Thus, an imperfect exemplar can affect individuals' motivation to be moral by several different routes that range from other-focused, to dual-focused, to self-focused variables.

## Study 3

Study 3 was designed to examine the generalizability of the effects observed in Studies 1a-1c and 2. In the first four studies, we used a famous exemplar to examine the effects of moral growth on modeling and motivation. Here, we wished to examine whether similar effects would be observed if Gandhi's moral success (and failure) were attributed to a closely matched, but unknown, figure. As explained in the introduction, we expect that the modeling of growth from moral failure is not dependent on the model being a famous moral exemplar like Gandhi. However, unknown moral figures are likely to be less morally motivating than famous ones.

## Method

**Participants.** 312 undergraduates from a public university in the Northeast U.S. participated in exchange for course credit. The following participants were excluded from analysis: 30

participants failed to correctly answer factual questions about the story; 14 participants spent more than 10 minutes on at least one page; 8 participants failed attention checks; 10 participants were extreme outliers ( $> 3$  SD above the mean on any outcome variable). Thus, the 250 remaining participants were analyzed ( $M_{\text{age}} = 18.6$ ,  $SD = 1.1$ ; 184 females, 66 males).

**Procedure.** Participants were randomly assigned to read one of the four versions of a moral figure's story used in Study 2 (failure without growth, potential growth, actual growth, no failure). Here, however, Mahatma Gandhi's story was presented as that of an unknown figure who we named Tharindu Liyange. Only key identifying information about Gandhi was altered, such as changing the nationality of the exemplar to Sri Lankan and city of birth to Colombo.

**Measures.** The same scales as Study 2 were used here to measure participants' perception of the figure's morality ( $\alpha = .89$ ), emotional elevation ( $\alpha = .81$ ), closeness to the figure ( $\alpha = .89$ ), modeling of the figure ( $\alpha = .84$ ), and moral self-concept ( $\alpha = .69$ ). We also again measured moral motivation as altruism ( $\alpha = .69$ ), concern for others ( $\alpha = .91$ ), and willingness to volunteer ( $\alpha = .78$ ).

## Results

Figure 6 shows that the unknown moral figure's failure without growth led to more negative reactions than no failure at all. In the failure without growth condition, participants perceived the exemplar to be less moral, felt less close to the exemplar, and were less emotionally elevated compared to the exemplar in the no failure condition, all  $p < .05$  (See Figure 6).

As in Study 2, in order to test the effects of the linear contrast, we used the coefficients -1, 0, 1 to represent the predicted linear increase in scores. Since preliminary analyses showed the alternative quadratic contrast to have no significant effects, it was excluded from further

analysis and we focused on the hypothesized linear contrast effect. As in the preceding studies, the figure's perceived morality, closeness to the exemplar and emotional elevation increased from failure without growth, to potential growth, to actual growth, all  $p < .05$  (see Figure 7). Means are shown in Figure 6. Taken together, these results show that our manipulation of moral failure was successful despite our attributing Gandhi's actual success (and failure) to an unknown figure.

**Modeling the Exemplar.** The nature of the unknown figure's failure had a significant, small-medium, effect on modeling of him,  $b = .288$ ,  $p = .009$ , 95% CI [.077, .509]. Figure 7 shows the full mediation model, which fit extremely well,  $X^2(1) = .064$ ,  $p = .799$ ;  $CFI = 1.00$ ,  $RMSEA < .001$ ,  $SRMR = .003$ . The increased modeling of the unknown figure who grew from his moral failure was explained by perceived closeness to him ( $p = .004$ , 95% CI [.073, .290]) and his perceived morality ( $p = .057$ , 95% CI [.008, .270]). Emotional elevation was not a significant mediator ( $p = .361$ , 95% CI [-.014, .095]). Thus, modeling of the unknown figure worked similarly to modeling of the famous exemplar, except that it was less based in emotional elevation.

**Moral Motivation.** The mediation model of general moral motivation is shown in Figure 8 (for a full list of correlations, see Table 6). It fit the data very well,  $X^2(2) = 27.02$ ,  $p = .135$ ;  $CFI = .978$ ,  $RMSEA = .043$ ,  $SRMR = .059$ . However, the unknown figure's growth from failure did not increase participants' view of themselves as moral,  $b = -.065$ ,  $p = .218$ , 95% CI [-.169, .037]. In addition, the unknown figure's growth from failure was *not* more motivating than his potential growth or failure without growth,  $b = -.68$ ,  $p = .047$ , 95% CI [-.150, -.012]. However much the unknown figure was modeled, this did not translate into more moral motivation for participants, as this path was not statistically significant. The negative effect of growth on motivation persisted when a simple model that examined the effect of growth on

moral motivation was tested without the mediator variables: the direct path remained significant and negative,  $b=-0.212$ ,  $p=0.042$ , 95% CI  $[-0.403, .006]$ , suggesting that this was not a suppression effect.

## Discussion

In Study 3, we sought to examine whether an unknown figure's growth from moral failure could encourage modeling in a way similar to that shown in the preceding studies for the famous exemplar of Gandhi. This was indeed the case. With the exception of emotional elevation, modeling of the unknown figure was explained in ways similar to modeling the famous exemplar. Although the unknown figure's growth from moral failure encouraged modeling of him, this modeling did not translate into more motivation to be moral. In fact, growth from failure led to less moral motivation. That the unknown figure was less motivating was also shown in the fact that his growth from failure did not lead to greater perceived morality of the self, as was the case with the famous exemplar. Thus, as we expected, the unknown figure was modeled in a way similar to Gandhi without offering a similar level of moral motivation. Growth from failure appears to be an effective motivator only in the case of a well-known exemplar who already has an established reputation.

We did not expect that the growth of the exemplar would lead to *less* moral motivation in the case of the unknown moral exemplar. It is possible that this was caused by an unexpected upward social comparison. Perhaps when the moral exemplar is extremely famous and is recognized by many to be an exceptional individual, participants are freely inspired by this extraordinary individual's story without directly comparing themselves with him. Thus, his powerful redemption story becomes more inspiring. In contrast, when participants are presented with an unknown exemplar who is not a legendary figure, they are much more likely to engage in upward social comparison. The moral success of this comparison individual leads them to view

themselves as less moral, which in turn leads to less moral motivation. The effect of this detrimental social comparison is stronger for the powerful redemption story. Thus, instead of being motivated by the growth story of the unknown exemplar, participants are demotivated by it. The exact reason for this negative effect should be examined more closely in further studies.

### Study 4

Study 4 was designed to examine whether the effects found in Studies 1a-1c, and Study 2, were limited to the moral domain. Thus, we performed a close adaptation of Study 2 to focus on the competence failure, rather than moral failure, of the moral exemplar Gandhi.

#### Method

**Participants.** 324 participants completed the study. However, 36 participants failed to accurately answer a basic question about the story; 16 participants spent more than 10 minutes on at least one page; 7 participants failed attention checks; 15 were outliers ( $> 3$  SD for any outcome); and 3 spontaneously expressed suspicion about authenticity of article. Exclusion of these problematic cases left 247 participants for analysis ( $M_{\text{age}} = 18.72$ ,  $SD = .98$ ; 163 females, 84 males).

**Procedure.** As in Study 2, participants were randomly assigned to read one of four versions of a famous moral exemplar's story (failure without growth, potential growth, actual growth, no failure). The stories were the same as in Study 2, with the exception that the study focused on a competence failure, rather than a moral failure. In order to ensure that the stories were as comparable to Study 2 as possible, the identity of the exemplar (Gandhi), aspects of the failure, and the harm the failure caused to others were kept the same. However, instead of stealing gold from his brother, here Gandhi financially mismanaged his organization which adversely affected the staff (the full stories can be found at: <https://db.tt/X1Nqw8sk>).

**Measures.** The same scales as Study 2 and Study 3 were used here to measure participants' perception of the exemplar's morality ( $\alpha = .85$ ), emotional elevation ( $\alpha = .87$ ), closeness to the exemplar ( $\alpha = .81$ ), and moral modeling of the exemplar ( $\alpha = .70$ ). The same scales were also used to measure moral self-concept ( $\alpha = .65$ ) and general moral motivation: altruism ( $\alpha = .70$ ), concern for others ( $\alpha = .83$ ), and willingness to volunteer ( $\alpha = .78$ ). To examine the effects of the moral exemplar's growth from a competence failure on measures of competence, we also assessed perception of Gandhi's competence (skillful, intelligent, competent,  $\alpha = .78$ ), participants' perception of self-competence (same items,  $\alpha = .68$ ), as well as 3 questions on modeling of the exemplar's competence that paralleled the items of moral modeling (i.e., I feel like it's possible for me to be a more competent person after reading this story,  $\alpha = .77$ ).

## Results

As expected, Gandhi's competence failure adversely affected perception of Gandhi's competence: participants perceived Gandhi to be significantly more competent in the no competence failure condition compared to the other conditions,  $p = .006$  (see Figure 9. For a full list of correlations, see Table 7). However, unlike his growth from a moral failure in the previous studies, Gandhi's growth from a competence failure did not mitigate against the effect of his failure. Thus, Gandhi was seen as less competent even when he grew from his competence failure, linear contrast  $p = .659$ . This is the first evidence that growth from competence failure is less redemptive than growth from moral failure.

Evidence that the moral exemplar's competence failure had effects quite different to the moral failure examined in the preceding studies is shown by the means in Figure 9. Growth from a competence failure did not increase participants' emotional elevation (linear contrast  $p = .304$ ),

closeness to Gandhi ( $p = .317$ ), or view of him as moral ( $p = .068$ ). Moreover, the manipulation of Gandhi's competence failure had no effect on the moral modeling of Gandhi, linear contrast  $p = .685$ . Neither did our manipulation affect participants' more general motivation to be moral (linear contrasts for volunteering, other concern, and altruism, respectively,  $p = .394$ ,  $p = .780$ ,  $p = .447$ ). Taken together, these results provide evidence against explaining the prior results of growth from moral failure as due to a general redemption suggested by growth from any failure. Instead, as we expected, moral modeling and motivation appear to be particularly affected by growth from a moral failure.

Further evidence that growth from competence failure is less redemptive than growth from moral failure comes from the additional measures we included regarding competence. Thus, the nature of Gandhi's competence failure did not significantly affect participants' perception of themselves as competent, linear contrast  $p = .659$ . Neither did the nature of Gandhi's competence failure affect participants' competence modeling of Gandhi, linear contrast  $p = .498$ .

## **Discussion**

In Study 4, we examined whether growth from a competence failure was inspiring in a way similar to that observed in the preceding studies for growth from a moral failure. As expected, a competence failure decreased participants' perception of the moral exemplar's competence. However, unlike growth from a moral failure, the growth from a competence failure examined here provided little inspiration to participants. Taken together, these results suggest against explaining the preceding results of growth from moral failure as due to a general redemption suggested by growth from any failure. Instead, as we expected, moral modeling and motivation appear to be particularly affected by growth from a moral failure.



Likely because Gandhi is a *moral* exemplar, his success and failure *in the competence domain* had little effect on how he is modeled in the competence domain or in the moral domain. If we were to examine competence exemplars who grew from a competence failure, we should expect this growth to have more impact on participants' modeling and motivation in the competence domain. Indeed, such effects have been shown in research that showed the especially inspiring nature of scientists who succeeded after initially struggling in their fields (Hong & Lin-Siegler, 2012).

### **General Discussion**

As social beings, we are deeply affected by the moral lives of other people. A neighbor's personal sacrifice to help another might inspire us to volunteer more, or observing a group of peers who cheat without compunction might lead us cut corners. However, psychology has rarely examined other people's moral lives as an influence on our own motivation to be moral. In this paper, we examined this influence by presenting participants with realistic life stories of a moral exemplar. Instead of a focus on seemingly perfect exemplars that is prevalent in most research (Walker & Henning, 2014), we examined reactions the failure of an otherwise outstanding moral exemplar like Gandhi. We all fail to be moral on occasion, and that includes moral heroes like Gandhi. Thus, we all have to come to terms with our moral heroes' mistakes.

As expected, a moral failure undermined Gandhi as a moral model because participants perceived him to be less moral, felt less close to him, and were less emotionally elevated by him. However, presenting Gandhi as growing from his failure mitigated against these negative effects. When Gandhi failed but grew, participants were once more inspired by Gandhi and could see him as a moral model. In fact, Gandhi who failed but grew was as inspiring as Gandhi who did not fail at all. Importantly, the nature of Gandhi's failure did not only affect modeling of him through other-focused and dual-focused means. The story of his growth from a failure allowed

participants to view themselves as more moral. This self-focused response to the exemplar's failure increased participants' general motivation to be moral, independent of their modeling of Gandhi. Thus, the exemplar's growth through failure actually led people to express more motivation to be altruistic, concerned for others, and to volunteer at personal cost. Together, these studies provide important evidence that imperfect, and thus more realistic, moral exemplars can be just as inspiring as seemingly perfect exemplars. By analyzing the three closely related studies of 1a-c with a multi-study approach, we were able to better estimate the size and robustness of the experimental effects on modeling of the exemplar, as well as accounting for variations across the studies.

These findings were replicated and extended in Study 2: in addition to moral modeling of the exemplar, growth of the exemplar also led to a higher moral self-concept as well as increased moral motivation. In addition, our analytic approach accounted for the inter-correlations between measures by examining them simultaneously, rather than singly. We also used alternative mediation models to show that our hypothesized models fit the data better than the most viable alternatives. Together, these measures strengthened the inferences we could draw from our findings.

In Study 3, we sought to find out whether growth of an unknown figure affected participants in the same way as the growth of a famous exemplar. As expected, an unknown figure was modeled just as much as a famous exemplar, but was less motivating morally. This suggests that iconic exemplars are particularly motivating, especially after exposure to their growth from moral failure. In Study 4, we established that it is specifically growth from a *moral* failure that is inspiring, rather than redemption from a competence failure. In the life of a moral exemplar, it is stories of *moral* redemption that are inspiring.

We should note that our findings may have been affected by the particular moral exemplar employed. Research on upward comparison suggests that extremely successful exemplars like Gandhi may engender little inspiration if their success is viewed as unattainable (Lockwood & Kunda, 1997). Gandhi, as well as the unknown exemplar employed, not only presents an extreme case of moral achievement, he is also dissimilar to the participants in nationality, religion, and context. The narratives had the hypothesized effects on the participants despite this significant dissimilarity. Future research should examine how stories of peer moral exemplars affect participants' inspiration, as they may have greater impact due to peer's greater similarity and attainability for participants.

Our findings were also striking because of the minimal manipulations employed. Indicating growth from a failure with a single sentence in a narrative produced significant differences in inspiration. In everyday life, moral exemplar's inspirational qualities are likely to be less subtle and less fleeting. The exemplar may be constantly available to the individual, serving as a regular reminder of the growth process. Thus, the effect of prolonged exposure to moral exemplar's growth may have a more profound effect on the observer than the subtle, one-time manipulations employed here. This is an important avenue for future research, as is the way in which people's narratives of growth from their own moral failure may prove to be inspiring or to otherwise motivating morally.

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### Footnotes

1. Across the three studies where sex was measured (Studies 1b, 1c, and 2), sex of the participants had a significant effect on modeling the exemplar or its mediators only once: in Study 1b, female participants ( $M=3.96$ ,  $SD=1.20$ ) were significantly more likely to feel close to the exemplar than male ( $M=3.63$ ,  $SD=1.13$ ) participants,  $F(1,243) = 4.91$ ,  $p = .028$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .020$ . There was no other significant effect for modeling or its mediators, all other  $p$ 's  $> .115$ . In Study 2, a MANOVA showed that sex did have a significant effect on the three moral motivation outcomes,  $F(3,304) = 5.42$ ,  $p=.001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .051$ , and an ANOVA showed a significant effect of sex on perceiving the self as moral  $F(1,307) = 6.05$ ,  $p=.014$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .019$ . Females reported more moral motivation and more perceived self-morality than males. However, a chi square test of condition with sex in Study 2 showed that sexes were distributed equally across the four conditions, and is unlikely to influence the outcome, Pearson  $\chi^2(3) = 4.24$ ,  $p=.237$ .

Table 1

*Summary of Methods for Studies 1a-1c*

	N	Sample	Failure without Growth Condition	Potential Growth Condition	Actual Growth Condition	Control Condition (No Failure)
Study 1a	194	MTurk	Moral failure	Moral failure + exposure of failure	Moral failure + confession + growth	
Study 1b	245	MTurk	Moral failure	Moral failure + confession of failure	Moral failure + confession + growth	Moral success only
Study 1c	258	Students	Moral failure	Moral failure + confession of failure	Moral failure + confession + growth	Moral success only



Table 2. *Study 1a: correlations for measured variables*

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Growth Linear Contrast	-	.280**	-.021	.174*	.177*	.130	.202**
2. Exemplar Morality		-	.609**	.608**	.406**	.275**	.355**
3. Exemplar Competence			-	.577**	.349**	.281**	.300**
4. Exemplar Sociability				-	.430**	.359**	.449**
5. Emotional Elevation					-	.408**	.583**
6. Closeness						-	.476**
7. Moral Modeling							-

Notes:  $N = 194$ .

\* $p < .05$ ; two-tailed.

\*\* $p < .01$ ; two-tailed.

Table 3. *Study 1b: correlations for measured variables*

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Growth Linear Contrast	-	.263**	.012	.104	.161*	.118	.107
2. Exemplar Morality		-	.566**	.581**	.407**	.190**	.385**
3. Exemplar Competence			-	.607**	.416**	.203**	.423**
4. Exemplar Sociability				-	.447**	.291**	.420**
5. Emotional Elevation					-	.361**	.533**
6. Closeness						-	.488**
7. Moral Modeling							-

Notes:  $N = 245$ .

\* $p < .05$ ; two-tailed.

\*\* $p < .01$ ; two-tailed.

Table 4. *Study 1c: correlations for measured variables*

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Growth Linear Contrast	-	.191**	-.017	.021	.128*	.084	.045
2. Exemplar Morality		-	.556**	.686**	.490**	.170**	.477**
3. Exemplar Competence			-	.673**	.421**	.262**	.431**
4. Exemplar Sociability				-	.400**	.203**	.444**
5. Emotional Elevation					-	.259**	.522**
6. Closeness						-	.408**
7. Moral Modeling							-

Notes:  $N = 258$ .

\* $p < .05$ ; two-tailed.

\*\* $p < .01$ ; two-tailed.

Table 5. *Study 2: correlations for measured variables*

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Growth Linear Contrast	-	.149**	-.047	.045	.286**	.184**	.172**	.173**	.108	.157*	.139*
2. Exemplar Morality		-	.602**	.734**	.368**	.308**	.399**	.123	.211**	.037	.179**
3. Exemplar Competence			-	.682**	.211**	.142*	.257**	.107	.249**	.095	.232**
4. Exemplar Sociability				-	.298**	.299**	.359**	.113	.185**	.131*	.219**
5. Emotional Elevation					-	.315**	.445**	.072	.038	.053	.138*
6. Closeness						-	.394**	.180**	.164*	.147*	.223**
7. Moral Modeling							-	.162*	.137*	.200**	.226**
8. Self Morality								-	.335**	.301**	.249**
9. Volunteering									-	.340**	.439**
10. Other concern										-	.436**
11. Altruism											-

Notes:  $N = 235$ .

‘no failure’ condition not included in the correlation table

\* $p < .05$ ; two-tailed.

\*\* $p < .01$ ; two-tailed.

Table 6. *Study 3: correlations for measured variables*

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Growth Linear Contrast	-	.486**	.050	.265**	.200**	.320**	.198**	-.093	-.083	-.173*	.054
2. Exemplar Morality		-	.516**	.738**	.473**	.523**	.391**	-.053	-.039	-.069	.017
3. Exemplar Competence			-	.701**	.515**	.296**	.253**	.033	.111	.047	.103
4. Exemplar Sociability				-	.494**	.456**	.339**	.019	.077	.034	.069
5. Emotional Elevation					-	.334**	.281**	.006	.165*	.144*	.168*
6. Closeness						-	.461**	.042	.084	.094	.114
7. Moral Modeling							-	.085	.070	.068	.085
8. Self Morality								-	.112	.418**	.233**
9. Volunteering									-	.428**	.239**
10. Other concern										-	.386**
11. Altruism											-

Notes:  $N = 187$ .

‘no failure’ condition not included in the correlation table

\* $p < .05$ ; two-tailed.

\*\* $p < .01$ ; two-tailed.

Table 7. *Study 4: correlations for measured variables*

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1. Growth Linear Contrast	-	.134	-.033	.000	.075	.074	.030	.042	-.044	.064	-.121	.049	.106
2. Exemplar Morality		-	.663**	.711**	.401**	.335**	.442**	.225**	.182*	.127	.111	.475**	.174*
3. Exemplar Competence			-	.617**	.346**	.287**	.387**	.177*	.188**	.187**	.139	.406**	.173*
4. Exemplar Sociability				-	.391**	.378**	.392**	.262**	.216**	.168*	.158*	.382**	.144*
5. Emotional Elevation					-	.404**	.415**	.227**	.239**	.253**	.265**	.467**	.131
6. Closeness						-	.486**	.225**	.324**	.289**	.249**	.447**	.118
7. Moral Modeling							-	.203**	.200	.203**	.196**	.724**	.064
8. Self Morality								-	.312**	.377**	.377**	.156*	.312**
9. Volunteering									-	.410**	.370**	.195**	.018
10. Other concern										-	.402**	.207**	.038
11. Altruism											-	.230**	.079
12. Competence Modeling												-	.049
13. Self Competence													-

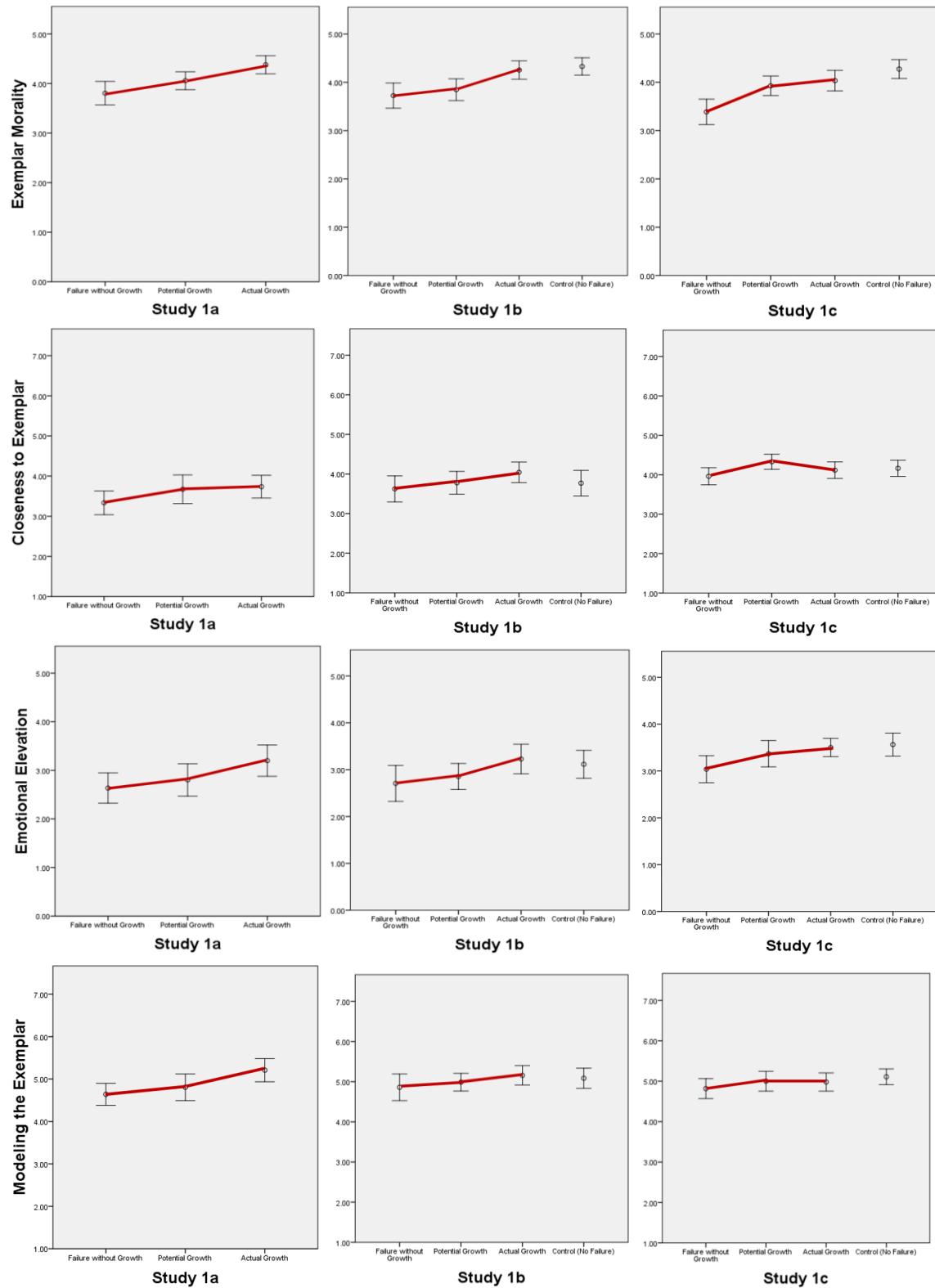
Notes:  $N = 189$ .

‘no failure’ condition not included in the correlation table

\* $p < .05$ ; two-tailed.

\*\* $p < .01$ ; two-tailed.

Figure 1 – Means for All Variables, Famous Exemplar, Studies 1a-1c



Note - Error bars represent 95% Confidence Interval.

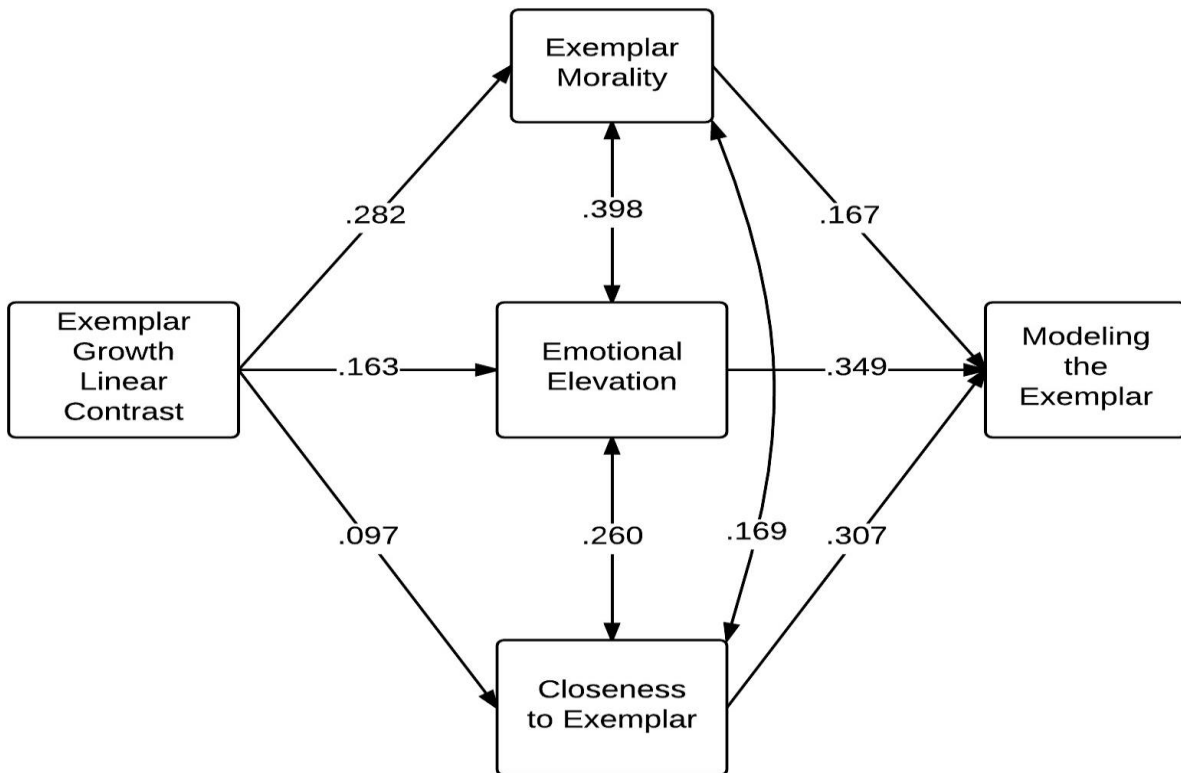
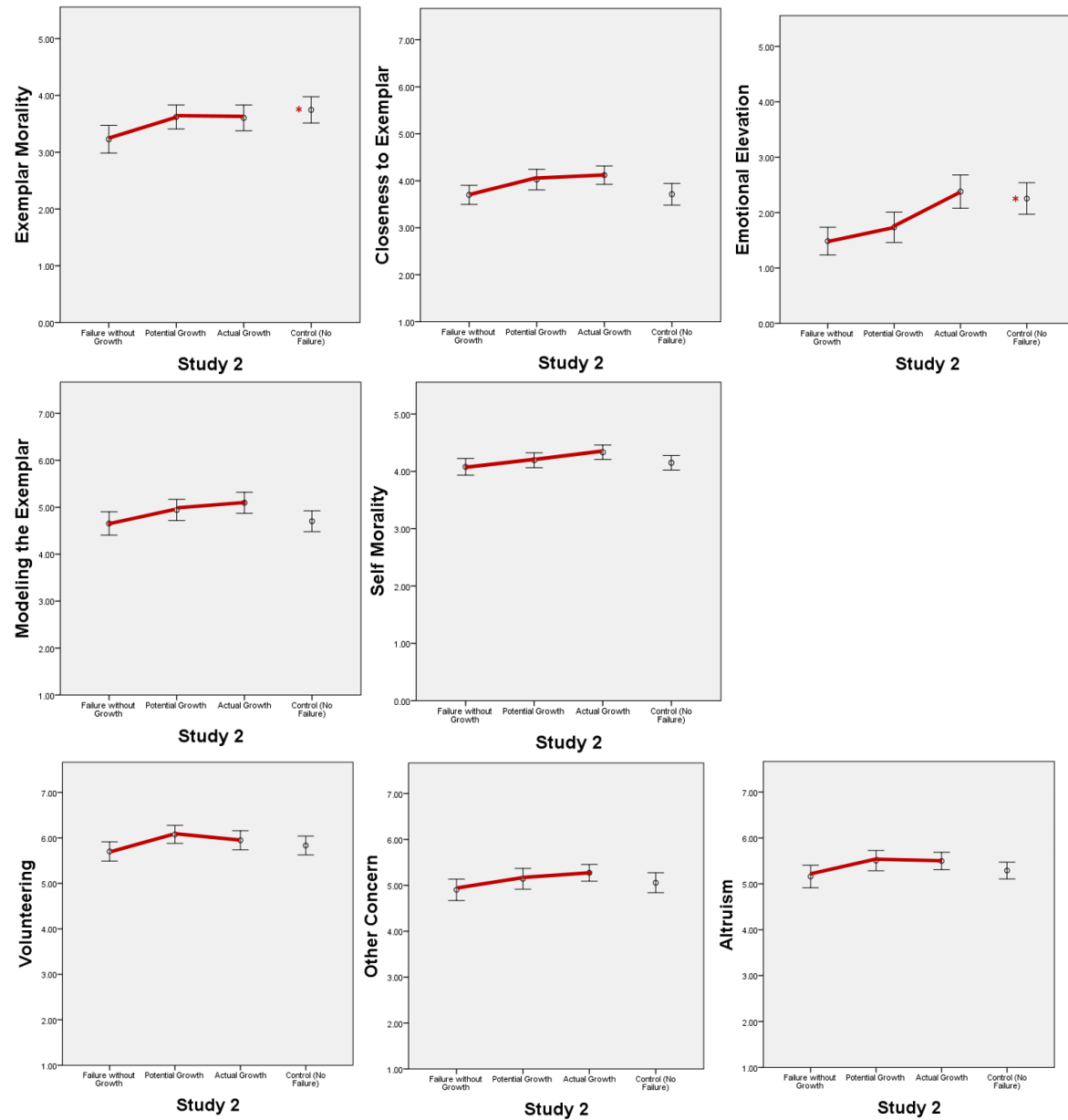
Figure 2 – *Multi-group Mediation Analysis of Modeling the Famous Exemplar, Studies 1a-1c*



Figure 3 – Means for All Variables, Famous Exemplar, Study 2



Note - Error bars represent 95% Confidence Interval.

\* mean for the 'no failure' condition is significantly higher than the 'failure without growth' condition,  $p < .05$ .

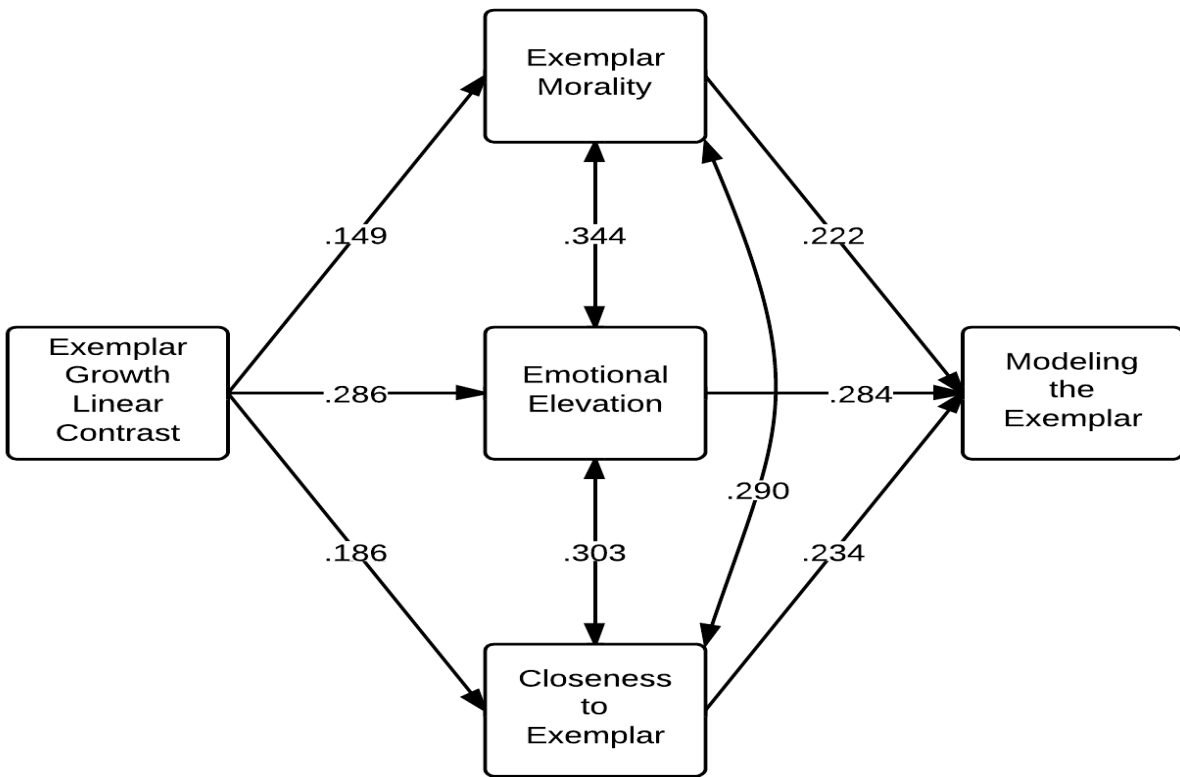
Figure 4 – *Mediation Analysis of Modeling the Famous Exemplar, Study 2*

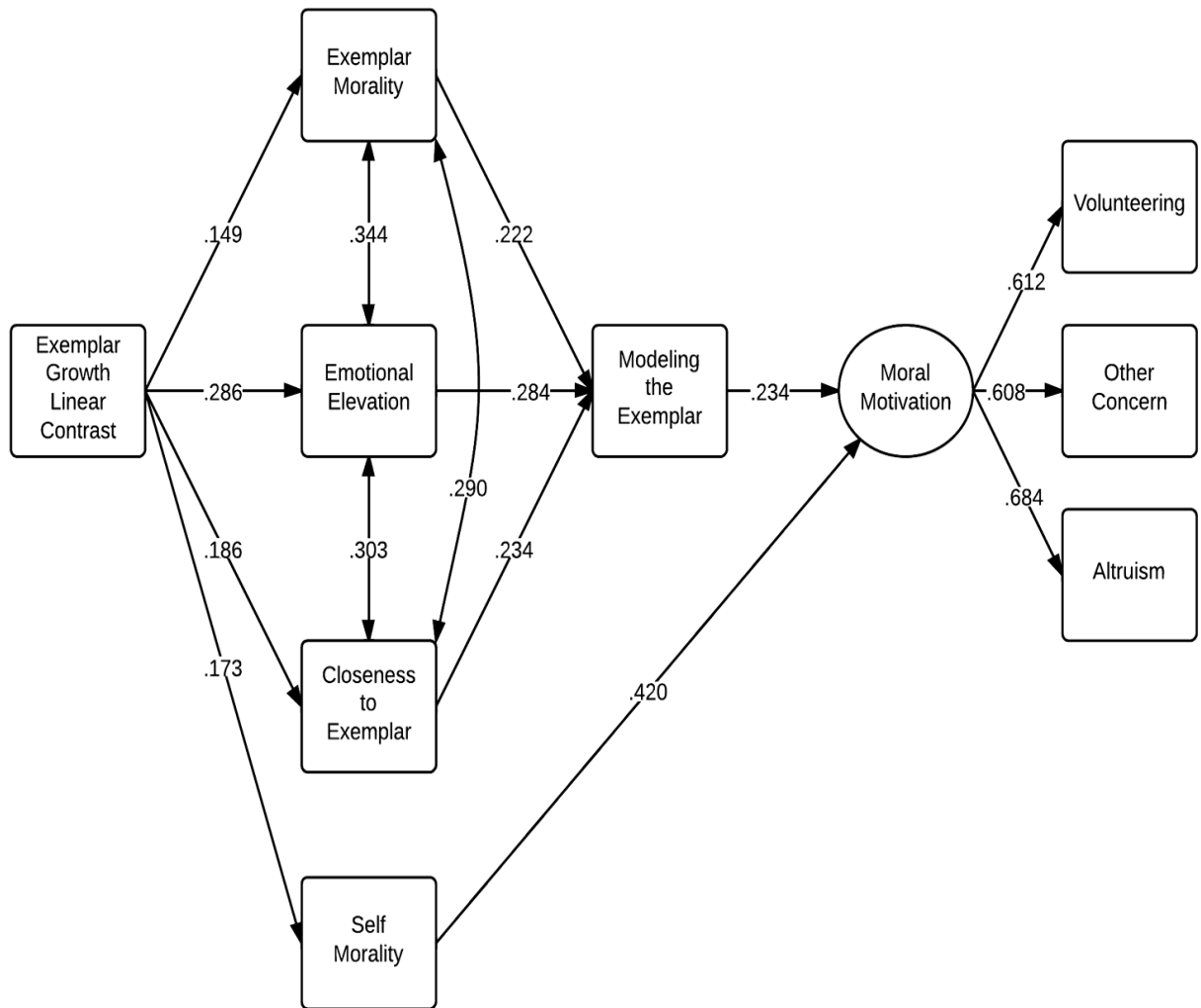
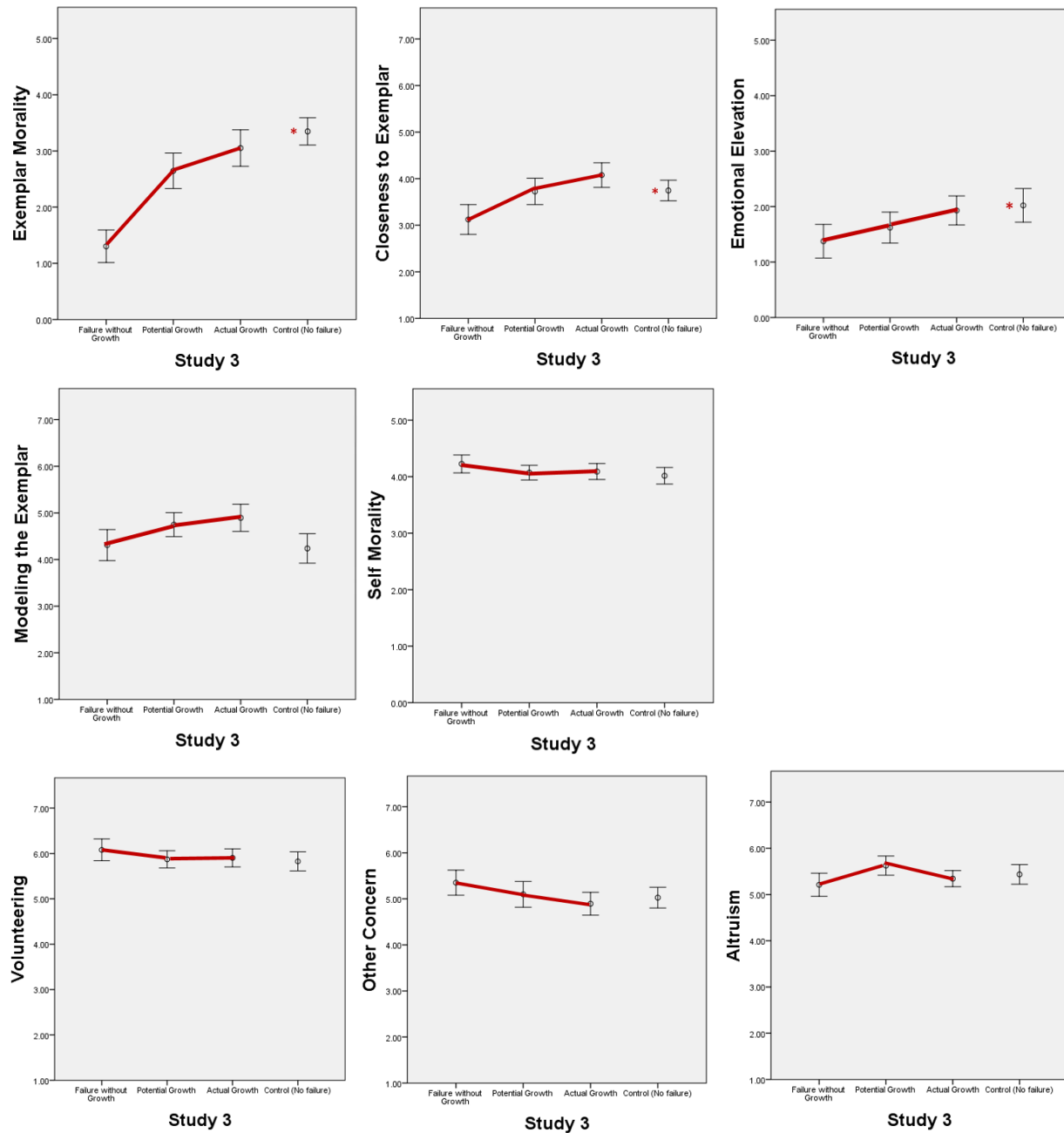
Figure 5 – *Full Mediation Model of Moral Motivation, Famous Exemplar, Study 2*

Figure 6 – Means for All Variables, Moral Figure, Study 3



Note - Error bars represent 95% Confidence Interval.

\* mean for the 'no failure' condition is significantly higher than the 'failure without growth' condition,  $p < .05$ .

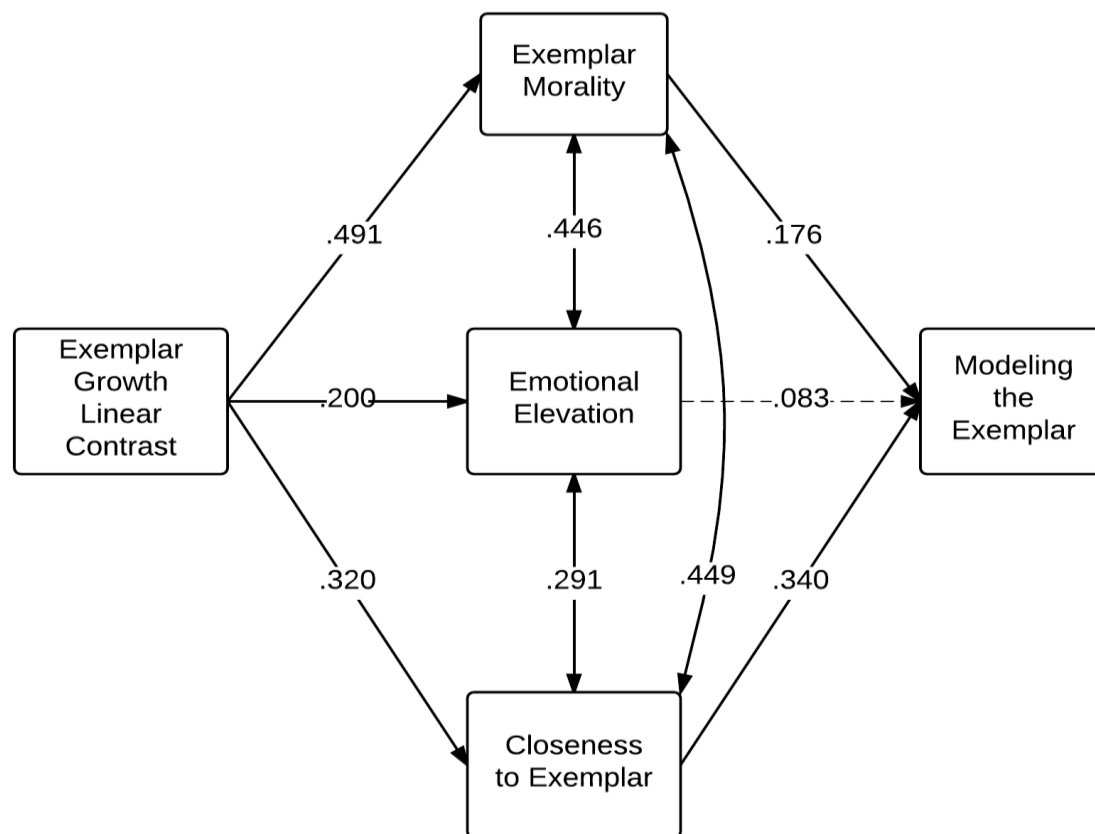
Figure 7 – *Mediation Analysis of Modeling the Moral Figure, Study 3*

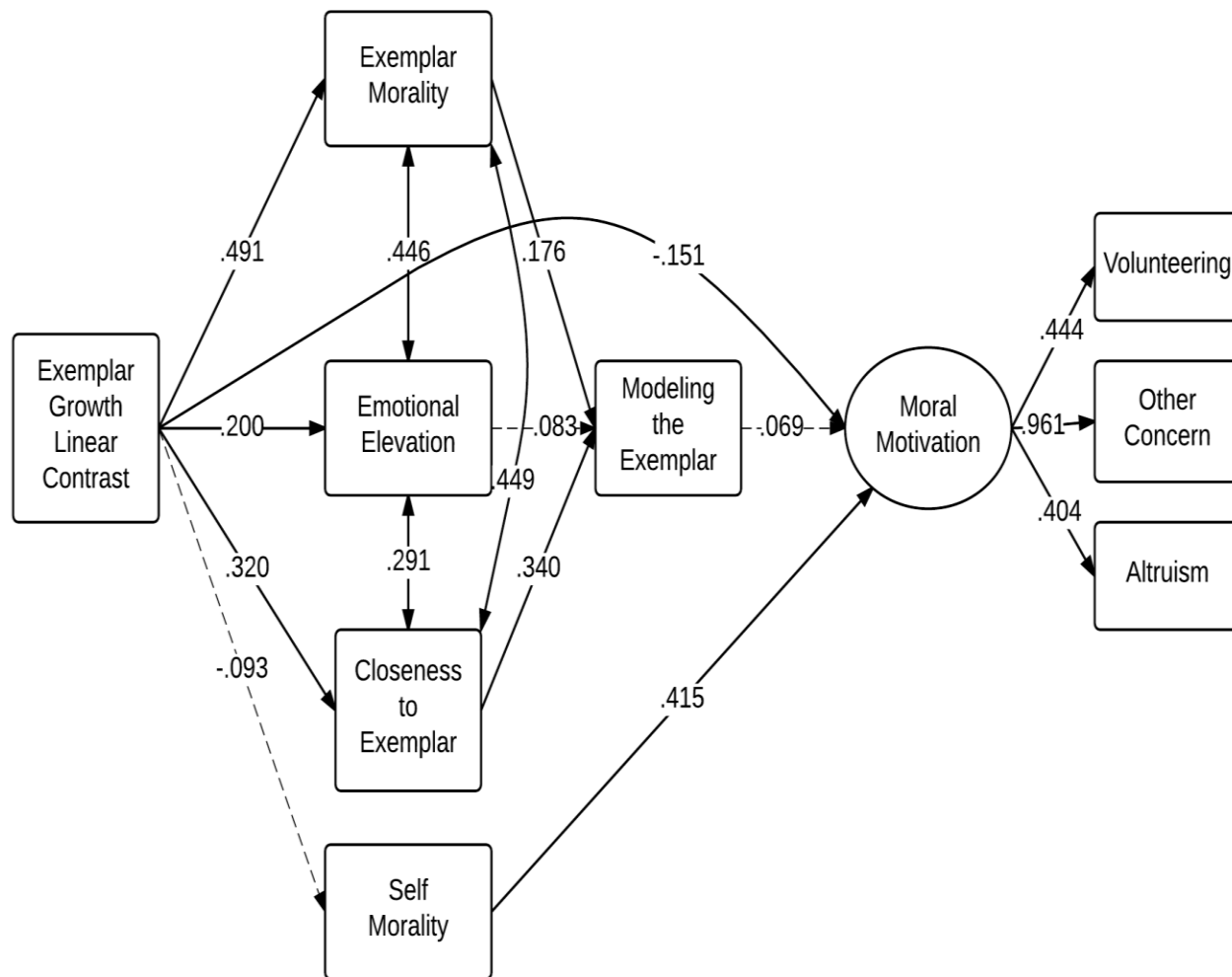
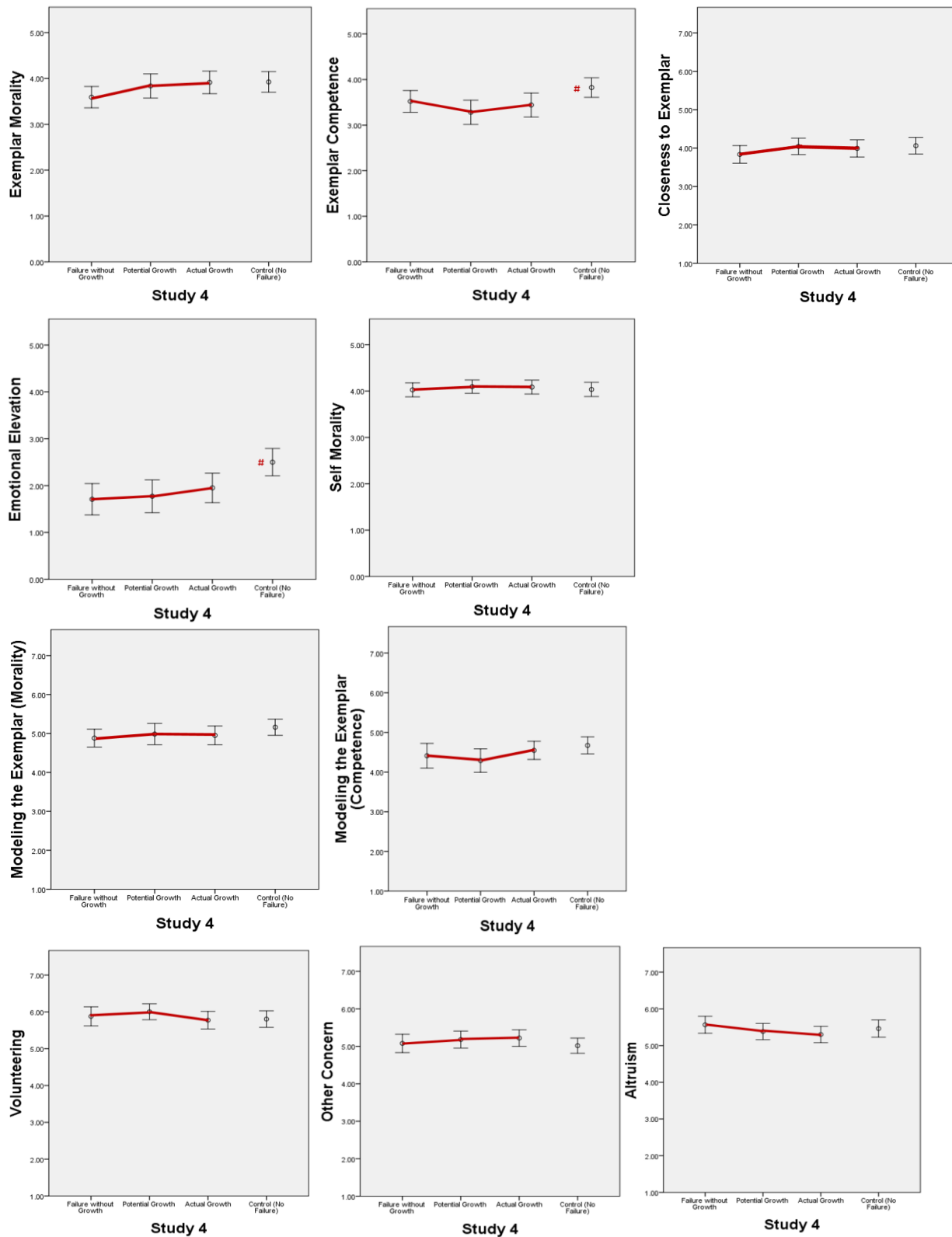
Figure 8 – *Mediation Analysis of Moral Motivation, Moral Figure, Study 3*

Figure 9 – Means for All Variables, Competence Failure of Moral Exemplar, Study 4



Note - Error bars represent 95% Confidence Interval. # mean for the 'no failure' condition is significantly higher than the mean of the three failure conditions,  $p < .05$ .

### **Chapter III**

#### **Imperfect Moral Exemplars in Sexual Assault Prevention Leadership Training**

In Chapter I, I proposed that a majority of research in moral psychology implies an entity theory of morality, which may reinforce an entity theory of morality among consumers of this research. I argued that such lay theories may have an important effect on how people react to their moral success and failures, how we judge, reward, and punish moral and immoral behavior, and how we develop interventions aimed at developing moral character. In Chapter II, I argued that people are particularly inspired by the lives of imperfect exemplars who grow from their moral failures and imply an incremental theory of morality – we do not have to pretend that our exemplars possess unchangeable perfect morality for them to be inspiring. I reported the results of 6 lab experiments that showed that growth of imperfect exemplars actually increases participants' motivation to be moral.

In order to further demonstrate the importance of imperfect moral exemplars in the real world, in Chapter III I propose 4 studies that examine the use of imperfect exemplars in a leadership training program. Specifically, I examine how the growth of exemplars from their failures can be an important part of a program that trains men to become effective leaders at sexual assault prevention efforts. As a part the sexual assault prevention program, called the Men's Project, undergraduate men participate in a series of workshops and exercises aimed at questioning past sexist behavior, committing to egalitarian future behavior, and building skills for being effective at stopping sexual assault. As the program promotes extensive self-reflection on past immoral behavior of the participants, the use of imperfect exemplars can be particularly effective in this program. In this chapter, I discuss sexual assault prevention programs targeting men, describe the Men's Project, argue for the importance of imperfect exemplars in this



program, and propose 4 studies that examine how imperfect exemplars can be used to achieve the target goals of the program.

### **Sexual Assault Prevention Campaigns Targeting Men**

In the National Crime Victimization Survey, an average of 237,868 victims of rape and sexual assault are reported each year (US Department of Justice, 2014). Sexual assault is extremely deleterious to victims' physical and mental health, and effective prevention campaigns must be developed to reduce rates of this crime (US Department of Justice, 2014). However, an examination of prominent campaigns reveals that they are often designed without referencing specific research on effective sexual assault prevention campaigns (see National Sexual Violence Resource Center, 2014). This is problematic, as many well-resourced public campaigns have been shown to be ineffective or counter-productive (for example, Government Accountability Office, Report on the DARE campaign, 2003). Research is required to examine the exact effects specific components of sexual assault prevention messages have on their target audience.

Without more specific research to guide policy and programming, most institutions develop prevention techniques that they intuitively believe will be most effective. A large majority of prevention programs aim at changing the behavior of women with little evidence that they are actually effective, or at least not harmful. In fact, such programs constitute about 92% of all sexual assault prevention programs (Gidycz, Orchowski, & Berkowitz, 2011). However, prevention workers have argued that programs that focus on changing the behavior of potential victims may in fact lead to blaming the victims (Culp-Ressler, 2014). When prevention messages exclusively include guidelines such as how to behave in a party and how much to drink, the audience of such a message might conclude that the victim would have prevented the sexual assault if he or she had acted according to such guidelines. This may start a vicious cycle of misattribution of responsibility, which in turn leads to the development of more victim-focused

prevention messages. All the while, the real challenge of changing the behavior of perpetrators of sexual assault may remain unaddressed. Victim blaming in response to sexual assault remains a pervasive problem and recent research on direct care providers shows that victims continue to be blamed for their sexual assault by medical, criminal justice, and legal systems (Maier, 2012). Interventions targeting potential victims' behavior may only make it worse.

In addition to these harmful side effects, victim-focused interventions may largely be ineffective at addressing the source of the problem. Men perpetrate sexual assault at much higher rates than women (Chan, Straus, Brownridge, Tiwari, & Leung, 2008; McDermott, Kilmartin, McKelvey, & Kridel, 2015), and overwhelmingly, their victims are women. Thus, reducing rates of sexual assault to a significant degree is not possible without addressing men's attitudes and behavior towards women. In fact, research has shown that sexual assault is enabled by a variety of attitudes, ideologies, and norms that many men believe defines masculinity. For example, Malamuth (1996) has argued that masculinity norms that encourage men to value dominance, toughness, competitiveness, and hostility towards women, summarized as 'hostile masculinity', lead to social environments where sexual assault is enabled and normalized. Similarly, Mosher and Sirkin (1984) proposed that ideologies of 'hypermasculinity' that associate manliness with violence, danger, and frequent sex creates a context that is hostile to women. In fact, Murnen, Wright, and Kaluzny (2002) showed in a meta-analysis that hostile masculinity and hypermasculinity have strong relationships with sexually aggressive behavior.

This research suggests that men are socialized into norms and ideologies that suggest that sexual assault is an acceptable and often necessary demonstration of one's masculinity. In light of the identification such masculine socialization as a critical source of sexual assault, any attempts to seriously address this issue needs to address such attitudes and socialization. Interventions and research aimed at changing the behavior, attitudes, and social environments of

potential perpetrators would address the problem at its source, rather than teaching potential victims how to protect themselves.

Furthermore, men who speak up against these ideologies may be more effective at influencing the behavior and attitudes of other men. Whereas a woman speaking up against hostile masculine ideologies may be dismissed as a ‘man-hater’, a male who makes the same arguments may be more difficult for men to dismiss (Katz, 2012). Thus, training men to be leaders in sexual assault prevention may be the most effective tool to change hostile masculine ideologies that leads to sexual assault. The Men’s Project is one such program developed to build capacity in men to become active in sexual assault prevention. The Men’s Project has two main goals: changing harmful ideologies and making men effective at speaking up.

### **The Men’s Project**

The Men’s Project is an 11-week program usually delivered through the course of a semester to undergraduate males on college campuses. It has three primary components that constitute three important aspects of capacity building to become sexual assault prevention activists (Stewart, 2015). The components are structured similarly to other prevalent sexual assault prevention programs that target men (Barone, Wolgemuth, & Linder, 2007). The first three weeks are devoted to facilitating reflection on gender norms, male privilege, and socialization and are aimed at changing harmful social norms based on masculine ideologies that are recognized to be an important cause of sexual assault. The second component aims to develop empathy in the participants and examines the depth of the harm and emotional impact of sexual assault. The final section seeks to build practical capacity in the participants to become effective at preventing sexual assault – by being effective at bystander intervention, speaking out against sexism, and engaging in institutional criticism.

The identification of different active components of the intervention is important, as it allows the targeting of workshops and activities tailored to suit these components. For example, male role models are used throughout the program, but especially in section 1 (social norms) and section 3 (bystander intervention). In these sections, participants watch videos or attend talks of prominent male sexual assault prevention activists. These talks are important for two reasons. First, they deliver important challenges to norms of masculinity, explore how they are connected to sexual assault, and discuss the importance of bystander intervention. Second, they provide examples of male role models who have eschewed defining themselves by these norms of masculinity, have become sexual assault prevention activists, and are not afraid to speak up against other men who engage in sexist language or behavior. In short, these prominent activists become moral exemplars for the participants and provide evidence that it is possible, acceptable, and just to be a male who stands against sexual violence.

Even though the use of male role models is an integral part of the program, they are delivered simultaneously with other workshops and exercises. Thus, even though the overall effectiveness of the program to reduce sexism and increase bystander intervention efficacy has been demonstrated (Stewart, 2015), without studies examining specific components, the effect of such components cannot be determined. Similarly, during their talks, some exemplars discuss their past failures, and some do not. Whether the exemplars' discussion of their past failures and their growth from them is effective in bringing about the goals of the program is unknown. Yet, inspiration by imperfect exemplars may be particularly important for the growth of the participants, especially during components of the program where men engage in often painful reflection on their past failures.

In the 1<sup>st</sup> section of the Men's Project, men are asked to reflect on a variety of past attitudes, language, and behavior they have engaged in that would be sexist or create a hostile

environment for women that is conducive to sexual assault. Similarly, in the 3<sup>rd</sup> section of the program, men are asked to reflect on times when they could have intervened or spoken up about somebody else's language, attitudes, or behavior, and they did not. This process of reflecting on past behavior, recognizing its wrongness, and changing it with positive future behaviors may be a particularly difficult process for men. Often, this component of the training brings up intense self-critical emotions, such as shame and guilt. In addition, especially if men feel their past attitudes are not unchangeable, they may react defensively, justify sexist attitudes and behavior, and undermine the goals of the program. Thus, being presented with imperfect exemplars who have held similar attitudes or exhibited similar sexist behavior in the past may play a very important role in their process of reflecting on and growth from their past behavior.

Given the key role that imperfect exemplars may play in the growth of the participations of the Men's Project, it is important to study their effect empirically. This information can be used to enhance aspects of the program that work, and remove elements that do not have the desired effect. Yet, few studies have empirically tested the influence of moral exemplars in sexual assault prevention programs. Despite a lack of emphasis on such research specifically in sexual assault prevention, educators have been using role models extensively to influence student character in educational programs in a variety of settings.

### **Use of Role Models in Education**

Since the functioning of society depends on individuals choosing to act morally, educators have been trying to understand how the influential setting of a classroom can be used as a crucible for character education. Towards this end, they have been examining various methods that can be used to instill values such as honesty or compassion in students in addition to the more typical academic goals. One method that has been consistently used in this context is the presentation of youth with role models that they can emulate. By observing or learning about

the behaviors and life of various exemplary individuals, students can learn how to be moral like them. Drawing inspiration from sources as diverse as Aristotle on the role of emulation in formation of good habits or Bandura's social learning theory (1961) that examines how children learn by observing and processing other people's behavior, a large variety of materials have been developed that educators can draw upon (Kristjansson, 2006). Some of these materials focus on the use of historical figures (for an example, see Rose, 2004), whereas others give instructions to teachers on how they themselves can become moral exemplars for their students (Noddings, 2010).

Despite the widespread use of such educational materials, few studies have tested their effectiveness in research. Thus, even though citations of prominent thinkers are common, how exactly role modeling is supposed to work, what practices are most effective, and when role models are unhelpful, is unknown. Furthermore, researchers have raised important questions about potential pitfalls of current practices of using role models. Foremost among them is the recognition that neither historical examples nor teachers are perfect models to be emulated, as they all have faults and shortcomings (Sanderse, 2013). In the absence of perfect role models to look up to, it may not be clear to the students which actions of the model should be emulated and which should not. Furthermore, if the exemplars are not perfect, students may be confused as to why they are being presented as exemplars in the first place.

If exemplars are presented with the assumption of an entity theory of moral character, educators are left with two unhelpful options. First, they can choose to ignore their imperfections and failures and present the exemplars as perfect people. However, this would only solidify an entity theory of moral character, perpetuate the idea that exemplars are perfect, and lead to disillusionment when students inevitably come across the failures of the exemplars. Second, educators can explicitly discuss the failures of exemplars. However, as demonstrated in the

Gandhi studies, a single failure can undermine the exemplar as a moral model and thereby reduce the effectiveness of the educational program (see also Trafimow & Trafimow, 1999).

The Gandhi studies in Chapter 2 showed that this issue can be overcome by discussing the lives of moral exemplars explicitly in an incremental theory of moral character context. By discussing the successes and failures of the exemplar as a part of the exemplar's story of growth, educators would not have to pretend that exemplars are perfect people, or that perfection is a requirement of being a role model. However, as few educational programs systematically tested the usage of exemplars in character education, the effect of discussing exemplars' failure in a context of growth has remains unexamined. Thus the examination of the role of imperfect exemplars as a part of a sexual assault prevention program can have important implications for the field of character education more broadly.

### **Studies Overview**

In order to examine the effect of imperfect exemplars in a sexual assault prevention training for men, I propose to conduct 4 studies that range from carefully controlled experiments to naturalistic observations. In order to replicate the effect of the Gandhi studies in this applied setting, studies 1a and 1b will use the same design of the Gandhi studies, with the manipulations and the measures tailored specifically to the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> sections of the Men's Project, respectively. Study 1a will be a randomized intervention implemented in section 1 of the Men's Project that presents participants different versions of an exemplar's story in order affect their perspectives on male social norms and sexist ideologies. Study 1b will use the same design, presenting participants different versions of exemplars' stories, but will be implemented in section 3 of the Men's Project. In accordance with the focus of this section on increasing bystander intervention efficacy and activism, the manipulations will be designed to address growth of the exemplars from failure to intervene. Together these two studies will demonstrate

that the study design used in Chapter 2 can be used in interventions that are aimed at increasing the efficacy of specific components in an educational program. Study 2 will use a more naturalistic design to examine if growth from failure is a particularly important part of an exemplars' story for participants. Participants will watch a videotaped talk by a prominent male sexual assault prevention activist, and will be asked to recall aspects of the talk. Study 3 will use an even more naturalistic method. Participants will be asked to keep a journal throughout the program, and the content of the journals will be analyzed to examine the impact of failures of exemplars. Thus, these 4 studies will examine the impact of growth of exemplars from failure using methods that range from tightly controlled experimental manipulations to more naturalistic methods.

### **Study 1a**

The aim of Study 1a is to examine how growth of moral exemplars from moral failures can be used as an educational tool to reduce Men's Project participants' sexist ideologies. This manipulation will be implemented in section 1 of the Men's Project that aims to change men's attitudes related to harmful masculine ideologies. Towards this end, the manipulation will feature different versions of an exemplar's story, with some versions of the story including an exemplar's growth from past sexist attitudes. By describing the exemplar's change from somebody who has failed morally by endorsing sexist attitudes to being an advocate of gender equality, this exemplar should communicate an incremental theory of morality. This should indicate that a change in moral character is possible, at least in reference to gender equality.

As in the growth stories of Gandhi in Chapter 2, this should have an important effect on participants. Like most men, all the participants of the Men's Project report a variety of sexist attitudes they held in the past or that they still hold in the present. If all the exemplars that they come across are presented as perfect people who have always held egalitarian views, participants



may not find the exemplars as relatable. If the morality of the exemplars is viewed as something that they always possessed, the participants may feel that they belong in a fundamentally different, 'non-sexist' group compared to themselves. Not finding them relatable in turn may lead to finding the exemplars less inspiring, and less easy to model.

Furthermore, the communication of an entity theory of morality by the exemplars by presenting them as perfect beings may also affect the way that the participants view themselves in light of their past failures. If the story of the moral exemplar suggests an entity theory of moral character in the domain of sexism, then participants may view their past sexist attitudes as evidence that they are currently sexist. Thus, they may view themselves as less moral. Similarly, since they may view evidence of past sexism as permanent sexism, they may feel less hopeful about their possibility to change. All of these factors may lead to a reduction in the effectiveness of the Men's Project to bring about attitude change in the participants.

In order to test these ideas, the manipulation will be delivered during the initial 3 weeks of the program that focuses on male socialization, masculine ideologies, and sexist norms. All participants will be presented with a full transcript of an inspiring talk given by the sexual assault prevention activist Tony Porter (Porter, 2010). By having participants study a transcript of the talk instead of watching it, aspects of the talk can be altered to fit the research questions. In this talk, Tony Porter describes the socialization of men into a strict 'man box' and the social punishment they face when they stray outside of these masculine norms. He also identifies this man box as an important reason for why men often devalue women. Throughout the talk, he shares anecdotes of his own life to illustrate his points, including instances where he himself held masculine norms hostile to women.

Participants will be randomly assigned to one of three experimental conditions, designed to be parallel to the 'Gandhi' studies reported in Chapter 2, where they will study slightly

different versions of Tony Porter's talk. As in the Gandhi stories, I will be comparing reactions to a 'perfect' exemplar who has not experienced failure, an imperfect exemplar who has experienced failure, and an imperfect exemplar who has experienced failure and has grown from it. In the 'no failure' condition, all references to Tony Porter's past failure will be removed. In the other conditions, a moral failure of Tony Porter will be described where he uses sexist language. In the failure without growth condition, participants will read an anecdote of Tony Porter telling another man to 'man up, and don't be a girl', thus implying his agreement with sexist masculine norms. In the failure with growth condition, the same anecdote will be described, but the exemplar will also discuss how he recognized the wrongness of what he did, and how this event became an important source of learning and growth for him. The 'potential growth' condition that was examined in the Gandhi studies will not be replicated in these studies in order to limit the number of cells in the experimental design and thereby increase power. The Gandhi studies demonstrated that actually growing from a failure is different from merely acknowledging a failure, and this point does not need to be reexamined in the present set of studies. In order to increase the effectiveness of the manipulation, participants will be asked a number of questions about the transcript to engage them more with the text.

Measures from the Gandhi studies will be used to measure reactions to the moral exemplar, in addition to measures of sexist ideologies that are the main focus of this study. Similar to the Gandhi studies, perceptions of the exemplar's character will be measured. The same three traits from Leach, Ellemers, and Barreto (2007), will be used to measure morality in terms of trustworthiness (sincere, honest, trustworthy). As a comparison, Tony Porter's perceived competence will be assessed with 'competent, intelligent, and skilled', and sociability will be assessed with the traits 'warm, friendly, likeable' (Leach et al., 2007). Emotional elevation will be measured by asking participants how much they felt 'admiration, awe, and

inspiration' (Aquino et al., 2011; Keltner & Haidt, 2003). Closeness to the exemplar will be examined with six items adapted from Tesser and colleagues (Tesser & Campbell, 1980). Participants' moral self-concept will be measured by asking participants to ascribe the trustworthiness traits to themselves. How much participants can use the exemplar as a moral model will be measured by adapting the 3 questions from the Gandhi studies in Chapter 2, based on Aquino et al. (2011). A new scale will be developed to measure participants' perception of the possibility of moral growth in their own lives. This new survey will include questions such as 'I believe that it is possible to hold egalitarian views even if I held sexist views in the past.'

Instead of the measures of general motivation used in the Gandhi studies, the primary outcomes here will be related to sexism. In order to measure overtly antagonistic attitudes towards women, the hostile sexism subscale of the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory will be used (Glick & Fiske, 1996). In order to measure chivalrous attitudes that show women as weak and in need of men's protection, the benevolent sexism subscale of the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory will be used (Glick & Fiske, 1996). Finally, agreeing with rape myths will be measured with the Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance scale, which examines false beliefs such as women cause their own rape through their choices (Payne, Lonsway, & Fitzgerald, 1999). In order to have a baseline comparison, these same measures will be administered to participants before the start of the Men's Project. I predict that, just as in the Gandhi studies, the exemplar's growth from failure will be most inspiring to participants, and will lead to the greatest reduction in hostile sexism, benevolent sexism, and rape myth acceptance.

### **Study 1b**

In Study 1a, I will use the design of the Gandhi studies to examine whether growth of moral exemplars from failure is inspiring for participants and leads to the greatest reduction of sexist ideologies. In Study 1b, I will adapt the design of Study 1a to develop an intervention

suited for the specific goals of section 3 of the Men's Project that seeks to build capacity for bystander intervention. The use of imperfect moral exemplars in this stage may be particularly important, as men may not feel comfortable speaking out about sexual harassment, sexual violence, or sexist language that they witness. As most men grow up being told that they need to embody certain hostile masculine norms to be 'real men', they may feel that they will be judged if they speak out. Thus, having an imperfect moral exemplar that the participants feel close to may be important to show that men can act outside of the traditional man box without being judged.

As men become feminist activists through participation in the Men's Project, being presented with imperfect exemplars may also help with avoiding an 'impostor syndrome'. As all participants have engaged in sexist behaviors in the past, they may feel that it is not their place to speak up against sexist behaviors. This may especially be true if the examples of men activists they are presented with are perfect, and have never displayed sexist attitudes and behaviors, and suggest an entity theory of morality: only those who have perfect morality should become activists. Thus, having imperfect exemplars can show men that even famous activists have failures and are in a process of learning. This might make the participants less afraid of their own shortcomings, and more willing to become active in sexual assault prevention, despite their shortcomings. Thus, the participants' should be able to better see the possibility of their growth from prior sexist behavior to individuals who speak out against and stop others' sexist behavior and language.

In this intervention, a transcript of a video by Jackson Katz will be used because it focuses specifically on bystander intervention (Katz, 2012). In this video, Jackson Katz argues that sexual assault prevention needs to be an important issue for men. He aims to build capacity in men to intervene when they witness sexist language or sexual assault, and discusses the

importance of men speaking up. As in Study 1a, all participants will read and study a transcript of the talk. The transcript will be modified to produce one of three conditions: a ‘perfect’ exemplar who has not experienced failure, an imperfect exemplar who has experienced failure, and an imperfect exemplar who has experienced failure and has grown from it. In the perfect exemplar condition, the transcript of Jackson Katz’s talk will be kept the same as the original version – no past moral failure will be discussed. In the ‘failure without growth’ condition, a story of him standing by without intervening in sexual harassment will be included. In the ‘failure with growth’ condition, the same failure to intervene will be reported. But this time, the transcript will also describe how he recognized the wrongness of his inaction, and how he learned from this event.

All the measures from Study 1a will be used to measure the reactions of the participants to the failure of the moral exemplar. In addition, in order to specifically examine the effect of the manipulations on intentions to act, two new questionnaires will be included. A scale will measure bystander intervention efficacy (Banyard, Plante, & Moynihan, 2005) by assessing whether participants perceived that they can make a difference in other men’s attitudes by speaking out. Collective action willingness will be measured with a survey to examine how willing participants would be to engage in collective action, such as participating in a protest against sexual assault (van Zomeren, Spears, Fischer, & Leach, 2004; Stewart, 2015). A new scale will be developed in order to assess participants’ perception of their own ability to play a leadership role in sexual assault prevention. The survey will include questions such as ‘I have too many shortcomings to play a leadership role in sexual assault prevention.’ As in Study 1a, I expect that participants in the moral failure with growth condition will demonstrate the most bystander intervention efficacy and willingness to engage in collective action.

## **Study 2**

In studies 1a and 1b, I will use carefully designed experiments to examine the effect of growth of exemplars on reducing sexism and increased perceived efficacy of bystander intervention. In Study 2, I will examine the effect of growth from failure of moral exemplars using a more naturalistic method. Specifically, I will examine what aspects of an exemplars' story the participants pay attention to the most, and the effect this has on the efficacy of Men's Project program goals. A variety of studies have shown that individuals especially pay attention to negative information. Thus, the story of a failure in the otherwise successful story of a moral exemplar should especially draw the attention of participants who are watching this video. Furthermore, researchers have argued that stories of redemption are also striking (McAdams, 2006). Thus, growth of an exemplar from a failure should be especially memorable for the participants.

In addition to the growth of the exemplar being one of the most remembered aspects of the story, I also expect that when participants pay attention to this aspect, it should make the program most effective. As in Studies 1a and 1b, paying the most attention to growth of an exemplar from his failures should make the participants feel closer to the exemplar, feel like they can emulate him more, see the possibility of growth in their lives, and ultimately be less sexist and more active in sexual assault prevention.

Using similar materials to Study 1a, I will examine what aspects of an exemplar's story are most vivid and prominent for participants. Thus, all participants will watch the original video of Tony Porter, whose transcription was used in Study 1a, including stories of his past failure and his growth from these experiences (Porter, 2010). Right after watching the video, participants will be asked to write their reflections about the talk. Participants' responses will be coded to record which aspects of the video they discuss the most frequently, specifically examining how often they mention his growth from a past failure. After the completion of the Men's Project,

about 2 months after the participants have watched the video, the participants will be again asked to remember the video and will be asked to describe the video. Again, the responses will be coded to determine which aspects of the video participants remember the most. At the time of completion of the Men's Project, participants will also be given a battery of surveys measuring closeness to the exemplar, inspiration, perception of the exemplar's morality, modeling the exemplar, perceive possibility of growth in one's own life, perceived possibility of playing a leadership role, Hostile and Benevolent Sexism, Rape Myth Acceptance, perceived bystander efficacy, and collective action willingness.

I expect that when participants reflect on the video soon after watching it, growth from the exemplars' moral failure will be one of the most prominent aspects of the talk that they comment on. Furthermore, I expect that this is also the element that participants will remember the most 2 months after watching it. In addition, since I believe this to be the most powerful component of the story, I hypothesize that reflecting on and remembering the exemplar's growth from failure will be most associated with reduced sexism and rape myth acceptance, and increased bystander efficacy and collective action willingness.

### **Study 3**

Study 3 will measure the impact of growth from failures using the most naturalistic method, as the participants' reflection on the materials of the Men's Project will be recorded without any prompts. Thus, throughout the Men's Project, participants will be asked to keep a weekly journal of their reactions to the training materials, and will be asked to reflect on their own lives. At the end of the Men's Project, the journals will be collected and coded for two important variables. First, the content of the journals will be coded for how much participants reflect on the growth from failures of the various exemplars who are discussed at various points of the training program. Second, the journals will be coded for how much participants reflect on

their own growth from failures. Indeed, throughout the Men's Project, reflections on past sexist behavior are a point frequently brought up by participants in discussion groups. I predict that reflecting on the growth from failures of moral exemplars will also lead participants to reflect on their own growth from failures. At the end of the Men's Project, participants will complete the same measures as in Study 2. I predict that reflecting on exemplars' and their own growth from failures will also be an important predictor of less sexism, less rape myth acceptance, increased bystander intervention efficacy, and increased willingness to engage in collective action.

Thus, together these 4 studies will examine the importance of exemplars' growth from failures in the context of a sexual assault prevention program. They will be some of the only studies conducted to examine the effectiveness of a specific component of a sexual assault prevention program. They will also be the first to examine the effectiveness of a specific component of a sexual assault preventing program that specifically targets men. I expect that these studies will show the importance of testing specific aspects of interventions in order to develop more effective interventions. I also expect that the studies will demonstrate that moral exemplars who grow from their failures can serve as powerful examples in various educational settings. I expect that presenting lives of exemplars that suggest an incremental theory of moral character will encourage participants to see the possibility of growth in their own lives.

The studies should also demonstrate that lay theories of morality that were discussed theoretically in Chapter I and empirically studied in Chapter II also have important implications for the development of educational programs and interventions. If moral exemplars are presented as perfect beings who have always possessed positive character traits and have not experienced real moral failures, researchers may be inadvertently implying an entity theory of morality to their audiences. This, in turn, may have an important influence on how other researchers study morality, and how various programs that address a variety of social issues are developed.





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