A grotesque and dark beauty: How moral identity and mechanisms of moral disengagement influence cognitive and emotional reactions to war ☆

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Abstract

Two studies examine the extent to which moral identity and moral disengagement jointly drive reactions to war. Study 1 finds support for a hypothesized positive relationship between moral disengagement and the perceived morality of a highly punitive response to the perpetuators of the September 11th attacks. It also finds that this effect was eliminated for participants who place high self-importance on their moral identities. Study 2 finds that moral disengagement effectively reduced the extent to which participants experienced negative emotions in reaction to abuses of Iraqi detainees by American soldiers; however, the effectiveness of moral disengagement was negated when participants' moral identities were primed.
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Introduction

Let me have a war, say I:
It exceeds peace as far as day
Does night; it's sprightly, waking, audible, full of vent

William Shakespeare
Coriolanus, Act IV, Scene V

People are often ambivalent about war. To some, war epitomizes all that is wicked and disturbing about human nature. To others, a just war waged to defend a country or preserve freedom is an admirable and necessary expression of a nation's power and moral goodness. Yet even its most ardent defenders usually recognize war for what it is: an organized form of mass killing. The tragedy of modern war is that most of those killed are civilians not soldiers. In the wars of the 1990s, for example, it has been estimated that 75–90% of all casualties were civilian deaths (Hedges, 2003). It can be disturbing for those who support a war to contemplate the loss of innocent lives because most people strive to maintain the belief that they and the groups they identify with are morally good (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Taylor & Brown, 1988). For obvious reasons, endorsing an activity that causes death and destruction on a massive scale can undermine these beliefs. Yet we know that

soldiers, politicians, and citizens manage to carry on with the business of war, sometimes with great enthusiasm and patriotic fervor, despite whatever doubts they may be experiencing.

Psychologists have offered many different answers to the question of how ordinary people reconcile their support for war (and the destructive activities it entails) with a self-view of being decent, caring, and kind. These answers include theories of aggression based on instinctive (e.g., Lorenz, 1967) and socio-biological models (e.g., Ghiglieri, 1999; Tooby & Cosmides, 1990); situational explanations such as difficult life conditions, submission to authority and role expectations (Milgram, 1974; Zimbardo, 1972); and more cognitively oriented theories emphasizing self-regulatory mechanisms (Bandura, 1999; Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, & Pastorelli, 1996) and beliefs about the world (Eidelson & Eidelson, 2003).

The present research adopts a socio-cognitive model (Bandura, 1991) to examine people's reactions to various actions taken by the US during the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. We take this approach because the socio-cognitive model explicitly recognizes the psychic need for people to resolve two seemingly inconsistent cognitions when they decide whether or not to support war: the desire to maintain a favorable view of the self and the need to justify actions that violate socialized self-sanctions against harming others.

Moral disengagement and shielding the self from moral consequences

One socio-cognitive explanation for why people participate in activities that cause harm to others is that they execute various mechanisms of *moral disengagement* that allow them to support or perpetrate harmful acts while maintaining a positive self-image (Bandura, 1999; Bandura et al., 1996). These mechanisms fall into several broad categories of dissonance reducing rationalizations that people use to shield the self from the consequences of inhumane conduct and the self-condemnations it may impose (Bandura, Caprara, Barbaranelli, Pastorelli, & Regalia, 2001). We focus on two distinct mechanisms involving the cognitive "reconstrual" of the conduct itself: *moral justification* and *advantageous comparison*. Moral justification occurs when harmful behavior is made personally and socially acceptable by depicting it as serving a valued or righteous social purpose (e.g., defending freedom) (Kelman & Hamilton, 1989). Advantageous comparison is a "cognitive contrast effect" that allows a person to convince him or herself that harmful conduct is relatively minor when compared to something more injurious within a similar context (e.g., inadvertently killing a few civilians during war is not as bad as a dictator executing thousands of his people). Either of these mechanisms can weaken self-deterrents against harming others while providing self-approval for such behavior (Bandura, 1999).

But moral disengagement maneuvers do not *always* allow people to violate self-sanctions against harming others. For example, during the infamous My Lai massacre in Vietnam, two American helicopter crewmen refused to join their fellow soldiers in the killing of unarmed civilians. Instead, they attempted to airlift victims of the slaughter to safety. Such acts beg the question of what factors might neutralize the "effectiveness" of moral disengagement. We sought to answer this question by examining another postulate of socio-cognitive theory; namely, that moral cognitions are translated into action through various self-regulatory mechanisms rooted in standards and self-sanctions associated with the *moral self* (Bandura, 1999). Drawing from recent theoretical conceptions in moral psychology (e.g., Aquino & Reed, 2002; Blasi, 1984, 1993), we refer to this construct as *moral identity*.

Moral identity neutralizes the effectiveness of moral disengagement

War is an obvious situation where disengagement practices are likely to be executed by those who support this activity, and even systematically encouraged by military leaders to ensure that soldiers are able to kill the enemy without hesitation or remorse (Grossman, 1995). In this paper, we explore the possibility that having a strong moral identity can neutralize or weaken these effects. Our main hypothesis is that while the execution of moral disengagement maneuvers will be positively (negatively) related to pro (anti) war cognitions and emotions, these relationships will be *weaker* when a person's moral identity is activated within the working self-concept. Below we present the theoretical rationale for this prediction.

Moral identity

We conceptualize moral identity as one of many possible identities that people use as a basis for self-definition. According to Blasi (1980), the moral personality results when a person constructs her identity on moral grounds and when moral commitments are central to her self-definition. The concept of moral identity is thus a key psychological mechanism that translates moral judgments, principles, or ideals into action. Similarly, Lapsley and Lasky (2001) suggest that a person who has a moral identity is one for whom moral schemas are chronically available, readily primed, and easily activated for processing social information. Building on this framework, Aquino and Reed (2002) proposed that most people possess a cognitive schema of the moral self that is organized around a set of moral trait associations. Both Aquino and Reed's (2002) and Lapsley and Lasky's (2001) conceptions are socio-cognitive models because they suggest that the activation of mental representations of the self is critical for processing social information and providing guidelines for action (Cervone & Shoda, 1999).

Contemporary cognitive theories of identity view the self as comprised of many different, hierarchically ordered identities of which only a subset, known as the working self-concept (Markus & Kunda, 1986), is accessible in memory at any given time (Stryker, 1980). An implication of this multi-faceted model is that the identities that are most cognitively salient are likely to have the strongest and most consistent influence on thoughts and emotions. Similarly, socio-cognitive theory would predict that self-regulatory mechanisms like moral identity should be most influential when they are readily accessible in memory. Based on this argument, we propose that the mechanisms of moral disengagement operate in the presence of different identities that are cognitively salient and that also serve a self-regulatory function. Although some of these identities may be irrelevant for thinking about war (e.g., occupational identity), others like moral identity are highly relevant and may therefore interact with moral disengagement processes to influence war-related cognitions and emotions.

Our hypothesis about how moral identity and moral disengagement processes will interact is based on two theoretical premises: (1) that people routinely establish psychological group boundaries that define those groups toward whom they feel connected and obligated to show social moral concern (Glover, 2000; Staub, 1989) and (2) that people feel a stronger moral obligation to show concern for the needs and interests of out-groups when their moral identity has high as compared to low self-importance (Reed & Aquino, 2003). Aquino and colleagues referred to this latter orientation as reflecting the expansion of one's "circle of moral regard" (cf. Singer, 1981). If high moral identifiers are indeed more likely to expand their circle of moral regard, then they should also be more willing than low moral identifiers to take into account the suffering that war inflicts on others, even if these others are deemed by political leaders as "enemies." As a result, having a highly self-important moral identity might be associated with more anti-war cognitions and emotions. But here we evaluate a more complex prediction that involves moral disengagement. Specifically, we examine whether another possible consequence of the outward expansion of the circle of moral regard is that it can neutralize the effect of moral disengagement. This can occur because including an enemy within the psychological and emotional boundaries of one's moral community can lead to their humanization, which is one of the ways by which moral disengagement mechanisms might be disabled (Bandura, 1999).

Overview of studies

The above arguments are tested in two studies. Study 1 tested whether having a self-important moral identity can weaken the positive relationship between moral disengagement and the endorsement of a highly punitive response toward out-group members responsible for the September 11th attacks. These data were collected in January 2002, shortly after the American invasion of Afghanistan. Study

2 examines negative emotional reactions to the abuse of Iraqi prisoners inflicted by US troops. Study 2 data were collected in February, 2006 at a time when the abuse and torture of Iraqi prisoners by US soldiers was widely debated in the media.

Study 1: Judgments of a highly punitive response to the 9/11 attacks

If asked, many people probably would not admit that they would enjoy taking revenge against those who harm them. Yet the impulse to retaliate against transgressors is among the most ancient and universal of human motives. The "law of the talion" cited in Exodus 21:23–25, called for "life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burning for burning, wound for wound, stripe for stripe." Revenge can be found in all human societies because, as Nietzsche (1887) once observed, it can elevate one's ego and demonstrate one's ability to assert his or her right to a just outcome. Revenge also serves a practical, defensive function by demonstrating that aggressive acts will not go unanswered and that violators of social norms will be punished (Axelrod, 1984; Tripp, Bies, & Aquino, 2002). For these reasons, people often accept taking revenge against transgressors as being justified and even morally "good" (Tripp et al., 2002).

The September 11th terrorist attacks against the United States would seem to be a case where taking revenge against those responsible would be viewed by many as a moral imperative. Indeed, the American public was almost unanimous in supporting military action against those responsible for 9/11 (Larson & Savych, 2005). The question we sought to answer in Study 1, however, was more nuanced. Namely, how would people's willingness to endorse a highly punitive form of revenge—killing the perpetrators of the 9/11 attacks—be influenced by moral disengagement and the self-importance of their moral identities? Specifically, we investigated whether these variables would predict whether people judge killing the 9/11 perpetrators as a more *moral* response than non-lethal alternatives (e.g., capturing and imprisoning them). We tested two hypotheses. First, we hypothesized that people who morally disengage would be more likely to judge killing the perpetrators of the 9/11 attacks as more moral than non-lethal responses. Second, we hypothesized that the preference for killing them would be weaker among people whose moral identity has high rather than low self-importance.

Method

Sample and procedure

One-hundred and four participants from a Northeastern university participated in this study. Sixty-two were female. Their average age was 20.5 years ($SD = 1.4$).

Data were collected using on-line surveys at two time points. At time 1, participants answered a battery of "personality tests," including a measure of the self-importance

of moral identity. Three months later, participants completed a computer exercise intended to measure reactions toward "historical events." They were told that the purpose of the study was to gain a comprehensive understanding of how people respond to and remember major events. Twenty pictures were taken from various online media regarding the World Trade Center attacks. The pictures were shown on a computer screen in random order. Participants were then asked the moral judgment and moral disengagement questions described below.

Measures

Moral identity. We used the five-item Internalization subscale of Aquino and Reed's (2002) moral identity instrument to measure this construct. According to Aquino and Reed (2002), the Internalization subscale captures the degree to which a person's moral identity is rooted at the core of one's being. We used this subscale because it appears to be the most robust predictor of morally relevant behavior (cf., Aquino & Reed, 2002; Reed & Aquino, 2003) and is consistent with the theoretical definition of moral identity we adopt in this paper. Respondents answered each item on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree; 7 = Strongly Agree). Items were averaged to form the measure ($\alpha = .85$).

Moral disengagement. Four items from Bandura et al.'s (1996) moral justification subscale were used to measure moral disengagement. This subscale was chosen because it presents participants with general rationalizations for violent retaliation (e.g., "It's alright to fight to protect your friends," "It's alright to beat someone up who badmouths your family"). Respondents answered on a 5-point scale (1 = Strongly disagree, 5 = Strongly agree). Items were averaged ($\alpha = .75$).

Control variable. We controlled for sex using dummy coding (0 = Male, 1 = Female) because there is evidence that women are less supportive of the use of military force in foreign policy than men (Bendyna, Finucane, Kirby, O'Dennell, & Wilcox, 1996; Fite, Genest, & Wilcox, 1990).

Moral judgment. We assessed people's judgments about the morality of different responses to the 9/11 perpetrators by asking them to choose which of five hypothetical responses they believed was *most moral*: (1) "Use any means necessary to kill those responsible for these acts," (2) "Try to capture, but not kill those responsible so that they can be tried, and if found guilty, imprisoned for the rest of their lives," (3) "Force those responsible to pay economic damages to the victims of their acts but do not kill them," (4) "Forgive those responsible for these acts, meaning negative emotions like hatred and anger should be replaced with positive emotions like compassion and love," (5) "Extend acts of goodwill towards those held responsible in an effort to promote reconciliation and mutual understanding between the parties in conflict." Response option one was

of primary interest because it is the most punitive; all other responses were collapsed into a single category to represent the choice of a non-lethal option. For our analysis, we coded killing the perpetrators as "1" and other responses as "0."

Results

We used logistic regression to test our hypotheses about moral judgments because the dependent variable was categorical. The variables forming the interaction term in the analysis (moral identity × moral disengagement) were centered to minimize multicollinearity between the interaction term and its components (Aiken & West, 1991). Results are shown in Table 1.

Moral disengagement was positively related to the choice of killing the perpetrators as the most moral response ($B = 2.19$, $p < .01$), as we predicted. However, this effect was qualified by a significant moral identity × moral disengagement interaction ($B = -3.68$, $p < .05$). We tested the simple slopes of the relationship between moral disengagement and killing the perpetrators for participants with high versus low moral identity. Group assignment was based on a median split of moral identity scores. This analysis revealed that while moral disengagement was positively related to choice of killing for low moral identifiers ($B = 4.38$, $p < .01$), there was no relationship between these variables for high moral identifiers ($B = .67$, ns). This pattern supports hypothesis 2.

Discussion

Study results show that people who hold beliefs that in general rationalize retaliatory aggression, were more likely to believe that killing those responsible for the 9/11 attacks was a more moral option than non-lethal responses. According to Bandura et al. (1996), these beliefs provide a justification for engaging in harmful acts by portraying them as serving a valued social or moral purpose. Importantly, the effect of this moral disengagement maneuver was moderated by the self-importance of moral identity. The pattern of results provides empirical evidence that the moral self may neutralize the effects of cognitive rationalizations that allow people to inflict harm upon others.

Table 1
Logistic regression of moral judgment on moral identity, moral disengagement, and their interaction

Variables	Moral judgment	
	B	Wald
Sex	.33	.17
Moral Identity (MI)	.88	.48
Moral Disengagement (MD)	2.19	9.00**
MI × MD	−3.68	5.18*
Model χ^2	48.24***	
Cox and Snell R^2	.28	
Nagelkerke R^2	.51	

Note: $^*p < .05$, $^{**}p < .01$, $^{***}p < .01$.

Despite evidence supporting our hypotheses, a key limitation of Study 1 is that moral disengagement and moral identity were measured variables, making it difficult to demonstrate causal relationships between these factors and the dependent variable. Study 2 used an experimental method to address this limitation and provide a causal test of the theoretical arguments involving the role of moral identity. We did this by directly manipulating the salience of participants' moral identities to examine its effect on emotional responses to acts of prisoner abuse committed by American soldiers. We also measured another type of moral disengagement maneuver—making advantageous comparisons—as a predictor of these responses.

Study 2: Emotional reactions to prisoner abuses

The treatment of the enemy in war has always posed a practical and moral challenge for military personnel. Recognizing that prisoners of war are helpless targets for acts of cruelty, and that torture may sometimes yield valuable military information, the nations of the world established the rules of the Geneva Convention to protect the rights of soldiers captured during wartime. For example, Article 3 prohibits aggressions, torture, cruel treatment, and outrages upon a person's personal dignity (Geneva Convention, 1949). In the spring of 2004, Americans learned that US soldiers had abused detainees at the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq. Photographs revealed that soldiers were stripping prisoners naked, forcing them to engage in sex acts, and subjecting them to intimidation tactics. After a thorough investigation of these incidents, Taguba (2004) concluded that US soldiers had committed "egregious acts and grave breaches of international law" (p. 50). After Abu Ghraib, the United Nations released a report on the treatment of detainees at Guantanamo Bay which intensified global concerns about the abuse of prisoners by the US military. Citing the use of excessive force, prolonged detainment without charge, and myriad other concerns, the report concluded that actions taken at Guantanamo Bay violate the Geneva Convention. It also recommended the immediate closure of the facility (United Nations, 2006).

Social psychological research suggests that acts like those committed at Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo Bay should not be surprising given the power of role expectations to shape the behavior of people in prison settings (Zimbardo, 1972). However, once such acts are publicly disclosed, an interesting question that builds on the findings of Study 1 is: How might Americans respond to US soldiers' abuses of prisoners? Not surprisingly, polls indicated that a large majority of Americans were concerned, upset, or angry about the incidents at Abu Ghraib (Langer, 2004). However, not all Americans felt so negatively (Morris & Langer, 2004). Study 2 examines the possibility that people's emotional reactions to the prisoner abuses might be influenced by the interplay of moral disengagement and moral identity. Following our previous arguments, we

hypothesized that moral disengagement would shield people from experiencing negative emotions when they learn about abuse. However, heightening the salience of moral identity should neutralize the effect of moral disengagement.

Method

Sample and procedures

The study was a two-group (moral identity prime vs. non-moral identity prime) between-subjects experiment, with moral disengagement as a measured independent variable. The sample consisted of 69 undergraduates, administrative staff, and community members residing in the Northeastern US. Forty-two were female. Their average age was 21.8 years ($SD = 3.0$).

The study consisted of several ostensibly unrelated pencil-and-paper tasks. The first task, which was described as a "Handwriting Study," was meant to either prime or not prime moral identity. After this task, participants were shown a page with several pictures of detainee camps that was titled "Ongoing Debate about Iraqi Prisoner Treatment Study." Following this page was an article describing how some US military and CIA officials credit the use of techniques like "the sensory deprivation of a prisoner or making the prisoner remain still for periods of time without visual stimulation" with helping them obtain valuable intelligence from Iraqi prisoners. The article was introduced to provide a context for answering a series of questions measuring moral disengagement. After answering these questions, participants read a second article that appeared in the November 7, 2005 issue of *The New York Times*. The article (see Appendix A) described the abuse of Iraqi prisoners by US troops. After reading the article, participants reported their emotional reactions to the incident. When they completed these tasks, participants were thanked, paid $10, and debriefed.

Experimental manipulation—moral identity prime

Participants were told that the handwriting task was meant to "examine people's handwriting styles as they tell stories." This description was intended to disguise the purpose of the priming procedure. In the priming task, participants were presented with a 9×5 matrix that contained nine character traits listed in each row in the first column. Participants were asked to write down (in their own handwriting) the nine traits across the remaining four columns so that each participant wrote down each trait four times. On the next page, participants were told to "take a few moments to think about each of these words. In the box below, write a brief story about yourself (in one or two paragraphs) which uses each of these words at least once. It may help you if you visualize each word as it is relevant to your life." When they were done, participants completed manipulation checks and other unrelated questions that served to reinforce the handwriting cover story.

Participants were randomly assigned to one of two priming conditions. In the *moral identity prime condition*, participants were asked to write and use the nine traits that comprise Aquino and Reed's (2002) moral identity instrument: Caring, Compassionate, Fair, Friendly, Generous, Helpful, Hardworking, Honest, and Kind. According to Aquino and Reed (2002), asking people to think about themselves in terms of these traits should make moral identity more salient in the working self-concept because the traits are highly associated with the moral self-schema (Aquino & Reed, 2002, Study 1b). In the *non-moral identity prime condition*, participants were asked to write and use nine positively valenced traits: Carefree, Compatible, Favorable, Generally, Happy, Harmless, Open-Minded, Respectable, and Polite. These traits are relatively more devoid of moral content than the previous traits; we do not expect them to activate a moral self-schema to the same degree.

Measures

Moral disengagement. We developed four items to measure the use of *advantageous comparisons* as a way to justify the abuse of Iraqi prisoners. These items were "Compared to the atrocious things Saddam Hussein would have done to our troops, the treatment of Iraqi prisoners was very mild," "Taking embarrassing photos of Iraqi prisoners is no big deal when you consider the harm Iraqis have brought to so many people," "Humiliating Iraqi prisoners is not too serious considering that they would have killed our soldiers on the battlefield," and "Compared to the attacks of Iraqis on American troops, the treatment of the prisoners was not that extreme." The items were answered on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = Completely disagree, 7 = Completely agree) and were averaged to form the moral disengagement measure ($\alpha = .86$).

Negative emotions. We used four items—distressed, guilty, ashamed, and upset—to measure the extent to which participants reported negative emotional reactions to the behavior of the US soldiers described in the *N. Y. Times* article. Participants reported how strongly they felt each emotion on a 5-point scale (1 = Very slightly, 5 = Extremely). Items were averaged to form a scale ($\alpha = .85$).

Control variable. We again controlled for sex (0 = Male, 1 = Female).

Results

Manipulation checks

Participants were asked to indicate how much the story they wrote in the handwriting task reflected how they see themselves as: (1) a student, (2) a member of an organization, (3) a moral person and (4) safety conscious (on a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 = To some extent, 7 = To a great extent). To assess the effectiveness of the moral identity priming manipulation, we conducted separate one-way ANOVAs for each of these items. The moral prime condi-

tion had a significant effect only on ratings of the extent to which participants' stories reflected on them as a moral person ($F(1, 67) = 13.09$, $p < .01$). No significant differences were detected for the other items (all F's < 2.1, *ns*). Participants in the moral prime condition reported that the story reflected more about them as a moral person ($M = 5.5$, $SD = 1.5$) than those in the non-primed condition ($M = 4.0$, $SD = 1.9$), suggesting that the priming procedure succeeded in increasing the salience of moral identity.

To verify that the moral identity priming manipulation did not affect the measurement of moral disengagement, we conducted a *t*-test. This analysis showed that the moral identity prime manipulation had no effect on moral disengagement ($t(67) = .67$, *ns*), suggesting that these variables represent distinct socio-cognitive mechanisms.

Hypothesis tests

Hierarchical regression was used to test Study 2 hypotheses. Specifically, negative emotion scores were regressed on the prime manipulation, moral disengagement, and the control variable (gender) in step one; step two included the moral prime × moral disengagement interaction. The prime manipulation was dummy coded (0 = Non-moral identity prime, 1 = Moral identity prime) and the variables forming the interaction were centered to minimize multicollinearity. Results are shown in Table 2.

As predicted, moral disengagement reduced the experience of negative emotions ($B = -.43$, $p < .001$) in response to the news report of American soldiers beating Iraqi detainees. This effect was qualified by a significant moral prime × moral disengagement interaction ($B = .61$, $p < .001$). We explored the pattern of this relationship by regressing negative emotions on moral disengagement in the primed and non-primed conditions, respectively. These analyses revealed that while moral disengagement was negatively related to negative emotions in the non-moral identity prime condition ($B = -.50$, $p < .001$), there was no relationship between these variables in the moral identity prime condition ($B = .10$, *ns*). As in Study 1, these results support our second hypothesis.

Discussion

Study 2 replicated and extended Study 1 findings by providing an experimental demonstration of the interactive

Table 2
Results of hierarchical regression on negative emotions (Study 2)

Variables	*B*	
	Step 1	Step 2
Sex	.60.*	.58*
Moral Identity Prime (MI)	.28	.29
Advantageous Comparison (AC)	−.23*	−.43***
MI × AC	—	.61**
R^2	.21	.33
ΔR^2		.12*

Note: *$p < 0.05$, **$p < 0.01$, ***$p < .001$.

effects of moral identity and moral disengagement in a different inter-group aggression context. The only effect of the moral identity prime was to neutralize the relationship between advantageous comparisons and negative emotions. This finding suggests that making a person's moral identity cognitively salient can emotionally reconnect the self to the moral consequences of war on others.

General discussion

The primary goal of this research was to examine whether moral disengagement maneuvers become less effective at allowing people to support war-related activities both cognitively and emotionally when the moral self occupies high importance in the working self-concept. This hypothesis was supported in two studies using different operationalizations of key constructs. The finding that moral identity and moral disengagement mechanisms interact is a novel empirical and theoretical extension of the literature on justifications for harm-doing.

Our findings also have important implications for researchers interested in how self-identities regulate emotions and judgment, particularly when people are confronted with human consequences of inter-group aggression and violence. Past research has shown that moral disengagement can motivate and justify aggression (Bandura, 1999). When a person can successfully justify aggression, there are theoretical reasons to believe that his or her self-conception is less likely to be threatened, even if they express support for activities that can harm or even kill other human beings. However, we showed that this effect might be bounded to the extent that part of this self-conception is organized around moral identity. This means that studying moral disengagement processes without taking into account the role of self-definition provides an incomplete picture of the psychological mechanisms that allow people to engage in inhumane acts. In this regard, our findings update and qualify Reed and Aquino's (2003) conclusions. They found a direct effect of moral identity such that moral identity was negatively (positively) correlated with perceptions of the morality of killing (forgiving) hostile perpetrators in war. The current research qualifies their finding by suggesting complex self-regulatory mechanisms linking this particular identity to moral disengagement.

Our findings raise new and important questions about when one self-regulatory mechanism might exert influence over another. For example, one way a person might execute a shift from one self-regulatory mechanism to another would be to alter the hierarchical ordering of the identities in their working self concept so that one mechanism - presumably the one that brings the least self-condemnation (e.g., moral identity) - comes to dominate the other (Fiske & Taylor, 1991). Future studies might explore this possibility experimentally by using a priming procedure like the one introduced herein to activate different and perhaps conflicting identities that expand or restrict the self-other relation.

Conclusion

The study of how people respond to war and its consequences warrants the attention of psychologists because while war is humankind's most destructive activity, it is also among its most compelling. As Hedges (2002) describes it:

> The rush of battle is a potent and often lethal addiction, for war is a drug…It is peddled by mythmakers—historians, war correspondents, filmmakers, novelists, and the state—all of whom endow it with qualities it often does possess: excitement, exoticism, power, chances to rise above our small stations in life, and a bizarre and fantastic universe that has a grotesque and dark beauty (p. 3).

For this reason, understanding the social psychological factors that make war so appealing to many people can help us discover how the inner voices that lead human beings to wage war can be momentarily silenced so that other voices—like those that remind us of its tragic cost—might also have a chance to speak.

Appendix A. Article Describing the Abuse of Iraqi Prisoners by American Soldiers

The US military said five soldiers from the 75th Ranger Regiment were charged on Saturday with detainee abuse, stemming from an incident on Sept. 7 "in which three detainees were allegedly punched and kicked while awaiting movement to a detention facility," reports CBS News correspondent Cami McCormick. The five have been charged with violations of the Uniform Code of Military Justice.

The Abu Ghraib abuse provoked global outrage and deepened Iraqi resentment of occupying US troops. A group of low-ranking American soldiers were convicted of abuse at the prison.

US forces are holding 13,885 prisoners at several detention centers in Iraq, according to figures from the military last week, including 5074 at Abu Ghraib.

Iraqi families, human rights groups and some Iraqi government ministers, including the justice minister, complain that too many Iraqis are being wrongfully detained for too long without due process.

Also Monday, four US soldiers were killed when a suicide car bomber attacked their checkpoint south of Baghdad, the military said.

US and Iraqi troops continued battling insurgents house-to-house, the third day of an assault against al Qaeda-led insurgents in a town near the Syrian border. The US command reported the first American death in the operation.

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