



The Medium and the Message: The Importance of Variables of Delivery in the use of Exemplar Narratives for Moral Formation

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Introduction (Abstract)

Stories about moral exemplars have long played an important role in efforts to cultivate specific virtues and develop moral character across diverse traditions. People are inspired by narratives in which paradigmatic examples of virtues are embodied by fictional characters, the admirable qualities of historical figures, or everyday role models. In recent years a growing body of research has endeavored to identify the features of effective exemplar narratives that contribute to their inspirational and motivational power; if this knowledge can be harnessed, there is great potential for it to be applied in educational settings.

Attempts to examine the effectiveness of exemplar narratives have tended to focus on the qualities of the exemplars. For example, Han, Kim, Jeong & Cohen (2017) report motivation to engage in voluntary service was better promoted by *attainable* and *relevant* exemplars. The former describes the, ‘... perceived possibility of being able to emulate a presented exemplary behaviour with a reasonable amount of effort’ (Lockwood & Kunda, 1997, cited, in Han et al., 2017, p. 2). The latter refers to the perception of similarity between exemplars and their target audience in terms of age, culture, shared interests, and so on. (Han et al., 2017, p. 2). Van de Ven, Archer & Engelen (2018) further reported that the perceived *importance* and *surprisingness* of a moral action are related to stronger admiration of role models, suggesting that exemplar narratives may be more effective if they also contain these features.

This paper proposes that a hitherto unexplored aspect of exemplar narratives is their mode of delivery. It also takes within its remit the question of what the narrative form itself contributes to the suasiveness of exemplar stories. We argue that the current literature focusing on the identifiable *features* of exemplar narratives could be enriched by taking these elements into account. Whether an exemplar narrative is communicated by the written or spoken word or by a professed expert or a novice is likely to have a bearing on its perceived credibility, its perceived authenticity, and its power to move, shift attitudes and motivate behaviour.

Whilst the identification of effective features of exemplar narratives offers insight into how educational resources to promote moral behaviors might be crafted incorporating these ‘ingredients’, the question of how exemplars promote virtue and emulation should take on board the way these messages are conveyed. We revisit Canadian philosopher, Marshall McLuhan’s contention that the communication medium *itself*, warrants examination and should be a key focus of study (McLuhan, 1964). In relation to moral exemplar narratives, the medium may be *part* of the message, and deserves greater research scrutiny.

[Please note that this is a *working draft in process*]

Imitative Behaviour and Role Modelling

Albert Bandura (1925 – 2021), was the father of social learning theory (now social *cognitive* theory). His influential ‘Bobo doll’ experiment (Bandura, Ross & Ross, 1961), demonstrated the concept of observational learning. Bandura showed that much learning occurs through observing (and imitating) the behaviour of other people, including siblings, parents, friends and teachers. The ‘Bobo doll’ study was a controlled, laboratory experiment conducted at the Stanford University nursery school with 72 children aged from 3 to 6.

In the first condition 12 boys and 12 girls saw a male or female actor behaving aggressively towards a toy called a ‘Bobo doll’, using a hammer to attack it and vocalising belligerently. In a second condition, 24 children (12 boys and 12 girls) watched a non-aggressive female or male actor playing quietly and non-aggressively with a construction set and ignoring the doll. In a control group, 12 boys and 12 girls were not exposed to any modelling from an actor and were simply placed in a room with the toys.

After this initial phase of the experiment, each participant was individually taken to another room containing more toys. As the children started to play, they were told the toy/s that had selected were the experimenter’s favourites and were reserved for use by the other children, in order to induce

a mildly aggressive, frustrated state. Shortly afterwards, in phase 3 of the study, the children were taken to another room which contained a selection of toys deemed 'aggressive' by the experimenters (including a mallet and peg board, dart guns and a large Bobo doll) and 'non-aggressive' toys, such as crayons, a tea set, three bears and plastic farm animals, where the participants were left to play for 20 minutes while their behaviour was observed through a one-way mirror.

Bandura et al (1961) reported that the children who had observed the aggressive model made significantly more imitative aggressive responses than children in the other two groups. These children also made more non-imitative aggressive gestures (i.e. aggressive behaviours that had the model had not enacted). The experiment demonstrated that behaviours (in this case, aggression) can be learned by observation, which has clear implications for the (moral) education of young people. Indeed, social learning theory (Bandura, 1977) was a key theoretical framework underlying 'entertainment education'; that is, media designed to educate through entertainment.

Following a role model or exemplar is not a straightforward matter of imitation, but this simple form of social learning is clearly germane to the question of how people might be inspired to undertake actions they witness others perform. People are influenced by behaviour in the social field and the informational content of explicit persuasive messaging does not take place within a vacuum.

Empirical Research on Role Models

Bandura's research demonstrated young people's susceptibility to be influenced by the behaviour of models, though the term 'role model' did not rise to prominence in educational circles until later. Warnick (2007) notes that when attention was turned to role models in education, the concept was theoretically underdeveloped and was characterised by an uncritical and broadly accepting view of the importance of role models for young people. Nonetheless, published research on role models in the contexts of education and youth development provides an important part of the background to the current examination.

For example, Bucher (1998) surveyed 1150 pupils in Austria and Germany and found that young people take as their primary role models people from their neighbourhood, and only secondarily make role models of their sporting or musical idols. This links to more recent work on the characteristics of exemplar narratives, which Han et al (2017) found to be more effective if they foregrounded exemplar qualities of being 'relevant' and 'attainable'. Bucher (1998) reported that participants' reasons why people became role models for them fell into two categories; either they embodied desired competencies (especially physical ones) or they acted in a morally right way. This concurs with the position the emotion of admiration drives the process through which people become exemplars (Zagzebski, 2017).

Several studies focus on the importance of role models in preventing young people from risky behaviours (Yancey, Siegel & McDaniel, 2002; Yancey, Grant, Kurosky, Kravitz-Wirtz & Mistry, 2011). More positively, Hurd, Zimmerman and Yue (2008) demonstrated that negative adult influences can be attenuated by the protective effects of role models in adolescents' lives. Similarly, Yancey et al (2011) argue that role models function not only to prevent risk but also to promote resilience in adolescents.

Certainly, this research attests to the importance of role models in young people's lives but does not illuminate how role models come to be emulated and whether there are characteristic features common to role models that inspire emulation by others. Furthermore, role models can be encountered in real life and in narrative and entirely fictional accounts. When exemplars are embedded within a narrative frame, additional factors affecting their potency come into play, as will be discussed below. For now, though, we shine a light on research that has aimed to identify the 'active ingredients' of exemplars.

Empirical Research on Effective Features of Exemplars

Han, Kim, Jeong & Cohen (2017) tested whether motivation to engage in voluntary service as a form of moral behaviour was better promoted by attainable and relevant exemplars than unattainable and irrelevant exemplars. 'Attainability' was defined, following Lockwood & Kunda (1997) as the '...perceived possibility of being able to emulate a presented exemplary behaviour with a reasonable amount of effort' (Han et al, 2017, p. 2). 'Relevance' referred to whether exemplars were perceived to be similar to the Korean participants in the study in terms of age, culture, and shared interests.

In the first, laboratory-based study, Han et al. (2017) reported that stories of attainable exemplars more effectively promoted self-reported voluntary service activity among undergraduates compared with unattainable exemplars and non-moral stories (used as a control). In a second, quasi-experimental study, middle school age Korean children were more inspired to service engagement by peer exemplars, who were perceived to be *both* attainable and relevant to students, than they were by historical figures that featured as examples in school-based moral education class. A questionnaire, statement of intention to participate and actual certificates of participation from organisations were used to evidence this engagement. This aligns with Bucher's (1998) finding that young people primarily took as role models people from their social neighbourhood rather than more remote media figures. In terms of proposals for moral education, these findings suggest that moral educators should ensure any stories they use in educational programmes should foreground attainable and relevant exemplars.

In a similar study aiming to identify the features of effective exemplars, Van de Ven, Archer & Engelen (2018) reported that the perceived *importance* and perceived *surprisingness* of a moral action were related to stronger admiration of role models. While both factors played a part, the former was more significant than the latter. Following Study 1, they hypothesised that providing more detail about the moral actor and beneficiary (to increase the perceived importance of the moral action taken) would increase the admiration and inspiration role models elicit.

In Studies 2 and 3, the researchers provided more detail about the moral actor and the beneficiary of the moral action to participants, in order to increase the perceived importance of the

moral action taken. Across four vignettes, they found this increased the admiration (which they deemed emotional) and inspiration (which they identified as a motivational tendency) the moral role models elicited. Unfortunately, their attempts to manipulate the feature of surprise in the stories failed (Van de Ven, 2019, p, 393) rendering them unable to corroborate the salience of this feature from Study 1. Nonetheless, their work adds ‘importance’ to ‘attainability’ and ‘relevance’ as key features of exemplars reported in Han et al. (2017). This has practical educational implications; finding the antecedents of admiration for moral exemplars is important in designing interventions that can inspire people to become better persons (Van de Van et al, 2019).

Altering the ‘Choice Architecture’ in Stories about Exemplars

Alongside identifying the ‘active ingredients’ of exemplars, the framing of exemplar stories could be altered to make some of their features more salient and potent than others. Engelen, Thomas, Archer & Van de Ven (2018) suggest that exemplars could be effectively combined with ‘nudges’ to promote morally desirable behaviour.

‘Nudge Theory’ (Thayler & Sunstein 2008) derives from the two fields representing Cass Sunstein and Richard Thayer’s backgrounds in behavioural economics and legal scholarship respectively. In this bestselling book, they argue that ‘liberal paternalism’ can be used to influence people towards making ‘better’ choices (i.e. decisions that are more conducive to their well-being). For example, people could be nudged to choose healthier food options by making them more visible in a cafeteria display. Consciously arranging food in this premeditated way manipulates what nudge theorists call the ‘choice architecture’ agents face when deciding what to eat. However, the same principle can be used to design environments to help people make better economic or moral choices. As Sunstein writes, ‘in certain contexts, people are prone to error, and paternalistic interventions would make their lives better’ (Sunstein 2014, p. 4).

Notwithstanding critiques of this kind of interventionism, Engelen et al (2018) propose that the thirteen nudge strategies identified by Sunstein (Sunstein 2015, pp. 26-7)¹ be used within exemplar narratives to increase their force. Engelen et al. (2018) argue that exemplar narratives implicitly provide readers with a 'choice architecture' since 'moral exemplars are typically embedded in narrative structures whereby certain features of the choice situation are highlighted and others rendered less salient' (Engelen et al, 2018, p. 251). Indeed, according to Sunstein's thirteen criteria, exemplars make information available (criterion 2), personalise information (criterion 7), frame (moral) choices (criterion 8) and render options salient (criterion 9).

On this basis, Engelen et al (2018) contend that exemplar stories are *already* nudge strategies and advocate the conscious use of further nudge strategies within exemplar narratives to enhance their effectiveness. This informed use of nudge strategies could heighten moral exemplar narratives creating more affective stories, more relatable stories, and stories that trigger more admiration (Engelen et al, 2018, p. ?) In combining nudges with exemplars to create 'techniques' to help people behave more morally Engelen offers a further practical way in which exemplar narratives could be consciously shaped to be more effective. In addition to ensuring moral exemplar narratives contain the features of attainability, relevance and importance, he provides suggestions as to how nudge strategies embedded within these narratives could further influence people towards better moral choices.

From a pragmatic perspective, Engelen argues that nudge strategies can reduce the cognitive costs of practical decision-making by 'routinizing' many ethical choices. But however practical this move may be, it could be criticised for advocating unreasoned moral behaviour. Should people be

¹ Specifically including (1) setting default rules, (2) making information available, (3) simplifying complex tasks, (4) providing specific information to warn individuals, (5) providing similar information to remind, (6) making use easier, (7) personalising information, (8) framing and scheduling choices, (9) making options salient, (10) taking advantage of social norms, (11) non-monetary rewards, (12) active choice, or (13) pre-commitment strategies.

nudged into behaving more morally, or should all our moral thinking be based on considered reflection?

Engelen's response to criticisms that using nudge strategies could be manipulative, paternalistic or unreasoned is to note that moral exemplars typically use (self-)nudge strategies to facilitate moral decisions. He contends that moral exemplars 'design their choice environments in such a way that adherence is easy and temptation avoided'; in other words, conscious reflection is not required as certain ethical decisions become routine.

Communication Modality, Social Influence and Persuasion

This review has shown that exemplar narratives can be constructed in ways that enhance their potentially transformative power. The 'effective ingredients' of these narratives include foregrounding *relevant* and *attainable exemplars*, enhancing the *perceived importance* of the moral action by elaborating on the moral actor's qualities and the beneficiary's need of their help. Exemplar narratives could possibly be enhanced by an exemplar's *surprising* actions. The literature review has shown that the suaveness of exemplar narratives could be further sharpened by embedding '*nudge strategies*' within these narratives to further influence people towards making better moral choices.

While this review illustrates that much work has been done recently to identify the effective features of exemplar narratives, there is still more to be done. For example, little is known about how these exemplar narratives are to be delivered and by whom; does it make a difference who tells the story and the way they tell it? Furthermore, the term 'exemplar narrative' (which has come to be used to describe a story featuring an exemplar) has slipped into discussion without due consideration of what the *narrative* form itself might mean for the persuasiveness of the exemplars it contains. Having reviewed the state of current scholarship, attention will now be turned to interdisciplinary research in social psychology, advertising, media studies and literary studies to highlight the importance of the

medium through which exemplar narratives are communicated, and how this might also influence the likelihood of role models and exemplars being emulated.

Dual process models of communication have demonstrated that people process messages in two ways. Systematic processing entails careful and deliberative processing of a message, while heuristic processing entails the use of simplifying decision rules or 'heuristics' to quickly assess the message. When people process message content heuristically, they do not attend to the central features of the message communication itself and rely on peripheral cues, including the speaker's tone of voice, gender, speed of speech, accent and perceived attractiveness. While this knowledge is consciously deployed to persuasive effect in advertising campaigns, these variables could potentially derail the effectiveness of exemplar narratives used in a moral education intervention. Might exemplar moral education be better served by having participants read narratives about role models for *themselves*, or would audiobooks and podcasts deliver a more potent message? This is an empirical question, and one that has yet to be examined.

Dual Process Models of Communication

The 'Elaboration Likelihood Model' (ELM) was the first dual process model of communication to rise to prominence in the 1980s. It was based on an information processing approach towards understanding human cognition which used the analogy of the mind as a computer, initially proposed by Shannon and Weaver (1963). In the ELM, Petty and Cacioppo (1980) set out their view that people process persuasive messages in two ways; central and peripheral. In the former case, people consciously consider all the information supplied to them in, say, an advertising message or other form of persuasive communication. In using this central processing route, individuals make logical decisions that tend to result in a lasting change of attitude.

In contrast, when the peripheral processing route is taken, an individual is instead swayed by superficial features in the message communication, such as the attractiveness of the communicator

or the production quality of a message. Celebrity endorsements in the advertising industry exploit people's tendency to deploy peripheral processing and buy a particular brand of coffee based on its association with an attractive film star. Allegiance to the brand may be short-lived, however, as attitude change via the peripheral route tends not to endure for as long as that achieved by means of the central route.

Petty, Cacioppo & Goldman (1981) tested whether undergraduates' attitudes to examination policy were affected by strong or weak arguments that were given to students who were either directly affected by the proposal (high personal relevance) or who were not affected by the proposal (low personal relevance), by a communicator perceived to have either high or low expertise on the subject. The ELM predicted that if the message is of high personal relevance, students would use the central processing route, attending carefully to the arguments proposed, whereas if the message was of low personal relevance, undergraduates would instead rely on peripheral features (the perceived expertise of the message communicator) instead.

Results showed that if the message was of high personal relevance to students (i.e. exams were to be introduced the following year), attitudes were indeed influenced mainly by the quality of the message arguments (central route), whereas if the exams were to be instituted in 10 years' time (low relevance), students' attitudes were influenced primarily by the perceived expertise of the source (peripheral route). In this case, there is an interaction between the processing route used and self-relevant information. Thus, the way a message is received depends on the concerns of the message receiver – a point to which we will later return.

In a similar vein, Shelly Chaiken put forward the Heuristic Systematic Model (HSM) of Information Processing (Chaiken, 1980). This is also a dual process model of communication describing how people receive and process persuasive messages. Corresponding to the central and peripheral routes, Chaiken proposed that messages are processed systematically or heuristically. Akin to the ELM, systematic processing involves careful and deliberative processing of a message, while the latter uses

simplifying 'heuristics' to assess message content. Parallel to the ELM, the HSM also predicts that the degree to which an individual is persuaded by a message and to which it results in enduring attitude change depends on whether messages are processed heuristically or systematically.

Perhaps not surprisingly, a study published by Chaiken (1980), showed a similar effect to that reported by Petty, Cacioppo & Goldman (1981). In this study, undergraduates read a persuasive message from a likeable or unlikable communicator who presented either six or two arguments on one of two topics. Students in the 'high involvement' condition were expected to discuss the topic of the message at a future time, whereas students in the low involvement' condition expected to discuss a different, unrelated topic. Chaiken (1980) found that for students in the high involvement condition, opinion change was significantly greater if the students had been exposed to six arguments (more information) but was impervious to the likability of the communicator. As the HSM predicted, opinion change was significantly greater in the low involvement condition when the arguments had been provided by a likable communicator; whether the students had been exposed to two or six arguments made no difference. Again, the findings support the theory that increased personal salience steers people towards using careful, systematic information processing wherein message content is key. Conversely, lower personal investment is associated with persuasion by peripheral (or 'heuristic') cues. While personal investment in the content of a persuasive message could be induced temporarily (as here), Chaiken's study highlights that whether a message takes hold could also be affected by the message receiver's enduring interests and preoccupations. We return to this in a later section.

What difference might it make whether a persuasive message is communicated in writing, by audiotape or by videotape, and what bearing could this have for conveying exemplar narratives? Chaiken and Eagly (1983) conducted two studies in which a likeable or unlikeable communicator delivered a persuasive message in writing, by audiotape or by video. They reported that the likable communicator was more persuasive in the broadcast modalities than they were in writing, but the effect was reversed for the unlikable communicator. Audio and video recordings expose message

receivers to more communicator cues than the written word. These peripheral aspects of the message communication could either enhance or diminish the effectiveness of the persuasive communication. Audio and video recordings increase communicator-related information causing characteristics such as accent and/or appearance to exert a disproportionate effect on persuasion. Heuristic cues therefore trump systematic processing of the message content.

In an earlier study, Miller, Maruyama, Beaber and Valone (1976) examined whether speech rate affected the likelihood of attitude change when a speaker was deemed either more (or less) credible, and in relation to the complexity of the spoken message. Perhaps somewhat surprisingly their results suggested that the rate of speech functioned as a cue that augmented the credibility of the speaker. Rapid speech thus had a positive effect on persuasion. On average, participants seemed less concerned about whether they had taken in the whole message and more swayed by the 'fast talker'. This argues against a more systematic, information-processing interpretation of the effects of a fast speaking rate on attitude change, which would predict a negative effect on persuasion due to the increased likelihood of missing message information. These findings further highlight the importance of seemingly tangential features in the persuasion process at the expense of a more reasoned and systematic information-processing strategy.

What these studies have shown is that people can be put off or turned on by features that are unrelated to the actual content of a message. Dual process models of communication suggest that peripheral features in the delivery of exemplar narratives could hinder or heighten people's receptivity to the stories. This leads one to ask whether educators *should* present exemplar narratives in particular ways to enhance their effectiveness. Could teachers be justified in ensuring that the persuasive messages within exemplar narratives are only delivered by attractive 'fast-talkers' with a likeable tone of voice? Or would moral educators' efforts be better spent in teaching people about the biases in our ways of thinking that might inhibit us from seeing the underlying content of a message?

Receptivity to Message Content

A consideration that will be brought to bear on this examination, and one largely (though not completely absent from the discussion), is the identification of variables related to the listener's (message receiver's) receptivity to a given communication. As is known, some seeds fall on stony ground. What factors affect the potential of the 'ground' to absorb a message and allow it to take germinate? Karl Aquino has highlighted the importance of an individual's *moral identity* in relation to how receptive individuals are to morally salient information. Simply put, messages with morally relevant content are more likely to take root in individuals for whom morality is a highly valued dimension of their identity.

'Receiver-receptivity' towards moral exemplars may be affected by temporal variables. For instance, people could be primed to be more receptive to messages in the short-term, while in the long term it seems reasonable to hypothesise that people may be more likely to be transformed by exemplar narratives that embody virtues commensurate with their own personal constructs and values (Kelly, 1955). However, an exemplar narrative featuring a courageous whistle-blower might make more impact at a time when the message-receiver faced a quandary about whether to report a senior colleague for malpractice than it might otherwise.

A person who habitually values the virtue of modesty is more likely to be inspired by role models embodying this virtue than someone for whom modesty is evaluated a lesser virtue. Message receptivity is therefore affected by both situational demands and personal characteristics. Thus, educators need to be aware not only of the features of exemplar narratives and the media through which these are communicated, but they need also to take into account the prospective receptivity of the message-receiver, which may be affected by relatively stable qualities of personality as well as changing circumstances.

Admiration, Elevation & Moral Identity Centrality

Linda Zagzebski (2017) advocates a new moral theory whose ground lies in moral exemplars, rather than in foundational concepts of duties, rights or consequences. She proposes that moral theory builds by identifying exemplars, which we recognise through the emotion of admiration, and by reflective examination of the characteristics of these exemplars that move us and motivate us to follow their example.

Zagzebski (2017) identifies the emotion of admiration as the driving force behind our emulation of exemplars. She draws no distinction between moral exemplars and other types of exemplar. In both cases, admiration is what drives our human desire to imitate the exemplar. Other scholars, most notably those following Jonathan Haidt, distinguish between the emotions of elevation and admiration (e.g. Algoe & Haidt, 2009). They identify the former as the emotion which drives emulation of specifically *moral* virtues that motivates prosocial and affiliative behaviour, and use 'admiration' in relation to non-moral excellences of character which motivate self-improvement.

In an empirical study focusing on elevation (moral admiration), Karl Aquino and colleagues (2011) demonstrated that people higher in moral identity centrality (those for whom morality was key to their identity) reported more intense elevation emotions, had more positive views of humanity and wanted to become a better person having read about an act of 'uncommon goodness' than those lower in moral identity centrality (Aquino et al, 2011). People who scored higher in moral identity centrality (MIC) were also more likely to recall acts of moral goodness (indicative of cognitive bias towards morally salient information) than those lower in MIC. Self-reports and observed behaviour reports converged in showing that people higher in MIC experienced moral elevation in response to acts of moral goodness more strongly than those lower in MIC. Thus, moral identity appears to be a determining factor in an individual's susceptibility to experience moral elevation.

The study speaks to the earlier point about receptivity to exemplar narratives for it shows that those for whom morality is a defining feature of their identity (higher moral identity centrality),

experience *more* of the emotion that drives the desire to emulate exemplars, making imitation of role models more probable. Moreover, individuals higher in MIC were also more likely to behave in a prosocial way than their counterparts (Aquino et al, 2011).

In examining the effect of an elevated state on behaviour, Schnall, Roper & Fessler (2010) reported that participants experiencing elevation were more likely to volunteer for an unpaid study than participants in a neutral state (Study 1). In a second study, they found that participants who were temporarily induced to experience elevation spent almost twice as long as those induced to feel mirth or a neutral state, in helping the experimenter with a tedious task. Thus, feelings of elevation predicted the duration of subsequent helping behaviour; ‘...feeling moved and uplifted, having a warm feeling in the chest, wanting to become a better person, and wanting to help others... were highly correlated with subsequent helping behaviour, whereas feelings of amusement or happiness were not’ (Schnall et al, 2010, p. 319).

Take home message: findings suggest that even brief exposure to others’ prosocial behaviour motivates altruism.

[EXPAND AND ADD BELOW STUDY BY SCHNALL ET AL IF SPACE PERMITS IT]

But, is this really selfishness in disguise?! Schnall’s next experiment tests this out and links to Aquino’s work insofar as it ultimately demonstrates that *being focally aware of one’s moral values while experiencing elevation* can have the powerful effect of translating a person’s moral beliefs into action’

Schnall & Roper (2011)

Elevation puts moral values into action

Moral elevation has been shown to increase helping behaviour, but is this because of a threatened moral self-image (through social comparison with the exemplar)?

Participants engaged in self-affirmation which was followed by an induction of moral elevation or a neutral control mood.

Compared to the neutral mood, participants experiencing moral elevation showed *higher* levels of helping behaviour following self-affirmation

Study tests idea of 'moral licensing theory' (when people are reasonably sure of their moral integrity, they have little motivation to do further good - Monin, 2007)

When moral integrity is threatened people act pro-socially to 'restore the balance'

Is prosocial behaviour about restoring a threat to the ego, or is it about acting in line with good values?

80 **female** participants. Half watched a film clip used to induce elevation (from Oprah Winfrey show), while the other watched David Attenborough. Self-affirmation was achieved by asking half the participants to write about a recent experience in which they demonstrated one of their core values*, or to describe their journey to the University

Helping Behaviour (DV)

Whether participant was willing to fill in a questionnaire for the experimenter (which was timed)

Participants in the elevation condition who had completed the self-affirmation helped for longer than those who had self-affirmed but were in the control condition.

Participants who wrote about helping-related values spent more time in the helping task if they were in the elevation condition than controls. Helping was not as high for participants affirming selfish skills and talents

Moral licensing is a rational way of 'balancing the moral books'. But moral behaviour seems to derive from moral *emotions* (work on prosocial behaviour in animals and very young children speaks to the power of moral emotionals before rational capacities develop)

Schnall & Roper (2012) p. 377

'...our findings suggest that being focally aware of one's moral values while experiencing elevation can have the powerful effect of translating a person's moral beliefs into action'

Links to Aquino's research

These empirical studies show that the potency of a moral exemplar narrative is therefore not the sole property of the narrative itself; whether it contains attainable and relevant exemplars behaving in important and surprising ways, or whether the narrative is constructed in such a way that it 'nudges' people to emulate the role model. These elements may indeed stack the deck towards the likelihood of exemplars being imitated. However, there is also an interaction between person and story that is at work in considering the ability of exemplar narratives to inspire emulation; simply put, some people may be more receptive to moral content than others by disposition or (as noted earlier) by temporal circumstance.

Exemplar Stories and Narrative Transportation Theory

Above all, exemplar narratives are *stories* embedding exemplars within a narrative frame. Consequently, we must also take within our remit what the *narrative form* itself contributes to the effectiveness of moral exemplars embodied within them. Narrative Transportation Theory (Gerrig, 1993; Green & Brock, 2002) describes the process through which immersion in a story (through reading or through audio or visual media) induces people to change their attitudes or intentions to reflect what is happening in the story.

In this model of influence, narratives ‘transport’ readers or listeners to another world where (among other emotions) they might experience admiration that leads them to emulate the good qualities of some story characters and eschew the vices embodied by others. These characters do not have to be real, of course, though the effects of them in stimulating our moral imagination are often profound. Indeed, Thomas Jefferson (1771/1975) noted that literature may be a more potent elicitor of elevation than witnessed action. It seems likely that the mental state of narrative transportation (NT) could explain the power of stories to influence, and more specifically the persuasive effect of role models they exemplify.

To examine individual differences in the capacity for experiencing this state, Green and Brock (2000) created the ‘narrative transportation scale’ which appears to tap three key factors; cognitive aspects (exemplified by the item ‘I found myself thinking of ways the narrative could have turned out differently’), emotional-affective aspects (‘The narrative affected me emotionally’); and visual imagery (‘While I was reading the narrative I could easily picture the events in it taking place’) (Green & Brock, 2000, p. 704). A more recent meta-analysis proposes that narrative transportation is based on two key elements; empathy for characters in a story; and imaginative immersion in the story plot (Van Laer, de Ruyter, Visconti, and Wetzel, 2014).

Narrative transportation theory offers a further means of elucidating how people might become persuaded by stories and how they might follow moral exemplars contained within.

If a story is engrossing enough, the 'stoniness of the ground' might be less of an issue – link back to Aquino paper

Summary Points

Current focus on isolable *features* of exemplar narratives needs to be expanded to place them in the larger context in which persuasion is at work. Insights from these fields are relevant to the question of how people are moved by exemplar narratives. It's not just the features, but the emotional reaction, imagination and resonance with individuals' interests and values that are in operation.

For a full treatment we must draw into our review (as I have):

- Social psychology and media/communication studies (**emotional and gut reactions to peripheral message features that could derail central message content**)
- Gerrig's (1993) literary work on Narrative Transportation. Gerrig was first to coin NTT in the context of novels but it has since been taken up by psychologists looking at how persuasion occurs through stories, augmenting earlier theories of social influence (ability to **imagine and project oneself into story is a factor**)
- More account needs to be taken of message receiver's receptivity to exemplar narratives. This depends on personality (e.g. moral identity centrality, pre-existing personal constructs/virtues) as well as circumstance. (**creating a resonance of the story with the self**)

Future empirical work could examine the following questions:

- Is exemplar moral education better served by having participants read narratives about role models for *themselves*, or would audiobooks and podcasts deliver a more potent message?
Comparison study of different modes of delivery with different actors

- Study examining individual abilities in narrative transportation (use Transportation Scale-Short Form (TS-SF) Appel et al) and ensuing behavioural changes based on exemplar narrative interventions. Hypothesis: ability to be ‘transported’ predicts behaviour change
- Studies to see if we can influence listeners’ underlying receptivity to exemplars narrative messages -working on the *soil* not the plant. Can we make the ground less stony before we sow the seeds? Could we achieve this with temporary priming studies, or combine exemplar narrative interventions with other interventions to promote openness, intellectual humility etc, to see if these virtues further potentiate the effects of the exemplar narratives.

We are moved by our emotions and our imagination – and just occasionally by reason (!)

We need consider everything in this review to fully understand exemplar narratives and their power to inspire, persuade and transform.

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